SANSKRIT PLAYS

FROM EPIC SOURCES

The Five Nights
Potsherd as Envoy
The Embassy
Karna's Task
The Broken Thighs

Vikramorvasiyam

Rama's Later History

Henry W. Wells

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

INTRODUCTION

The historian of dramatic literature would be hard put to discover a form of composition so long-lived as Sanskrit drama. No one, I believe, would wish to lay down the precise dates for its arrival and demise and especially its origins are clouded with much uncertainty, owing to the by no means surprising paucity of records for early times. Little or nothing that can be called "primitive" exists to aid in elucidation of its origins. Many allusions, however, encourage the view that a mature drama flourished in India well before the Christian era. From causes too well known to be discussed here a rapid decline took place in the ninth and tenth centuries, owing to drastic social, political and linguistic changes throughout the land. On review of the actual playwriting one is aware of a freezing of the forms and rules of dramaturgy, with the result that well before 1000 A.D. whatever vestiges remained of a great and rigidly coherent tradition offered mere forms without vitality to inspire them. Naturally, what was essentially lifeless ceased to appeal to any considerable public. A tradition of well over a thousand years became only a treasured memory. No longer did delectable and nourishing fruit appear on the old branches.

It is unnecessary here to offer a general description of Sanskrit drama. So illustrious an achievement in playwriting has had many able apologists, especially in recent years. In introducing the present short selection of plays it is pertinent only to observe that from first to last the larger proportion of the most serious works was based on stories and themes derived from the great Sanskrit epics, notably the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. In some respects this course of Indian classical drama suggests the classical drama of the West. In each instance the most heroic plays derive their plots from the most venerable of the native epics. In each instance, too, a few distinctly serious plays present stories of monarchs or statesmen of more recent times. Both

these species of plays enjoyed what was originally taken to be the sanction of history. They were considered, broadly speaking, to represent what had actually occurred. Even if the heroes were manifestations of the gods, they were presented as men. The less elevated plays depicted persons of humbler station and, above all, used plots invented by their playwrights.

None of the plays in this book falls into the last mentioned category. All are of the highest dignity, their principal characters and episodes derived from epic sources. They are so much the more comparable to each other. On this account the selections supply, broadly speaking, a graph for the development of the major type of Sanskrit play as we know its history through the centuries of its flourishing. Any attentive reader will at once observe how many theatrical conventions are maintained from the earliest work, ascribed to Bhasa, to the latest, here represented by that of Bhavabhuti. No less remarkable are the changes that obviously take place within the general context. An austere tone gives way to a tone largely pathetic. Bhavabhuti's rendering of Rama's story is still heroic yet in many ways shows qualities rarely present in the Bhasa plays derived from the *Mahabharata* and remains in terms of Western criticism unmistakably romantic. The use of lyric stanzas imposed on the basic dramatic form is far more developed as time goes on. In a collection of such stanzas with respect to their intrinsic value as lyric poetry made experimentally by the present writer, only one passage from the work of Bhasa as contained in this book seemed appropriate. Eleven were chosen from Kalidasa's *Vikramorvashi*, twenty-two from his *Sakuntala*, and fifty-one from Bhavabhuti's masterpiece. Of course generalizations are perilous where evidence, as in the case of Sanskrit drama, is undeniably fragmentary. Moreover, the idiosyncrasies of individual playwrights must be taken into account. No commanding genius is ever merely representative, leaving works merely for the convenience of a superficial historian. Yet insofar as known no plays closely resembling those of Bhavabhuti were produced in earlier times and no plays closely resembling those

of Bhasa were composed during the later centuries of the dramatic movement. It is, accordingly, hoped that the present selection and arrangement may tell an impressive story in the evolution of a dramatic art.

A few words must be said regarding the individual plays selected and especially in the instance of Bhasa, since this presentation has an element of novelty. In introducing the epic drama of Bhasa two aspects are clearly of special importance, the nature of the Sanskrit original and the aims of the English rendition. The prior consideration is, obviously, the Sanskrit drama.

Its date and authorship are singularly obscure. Kalidasa, foremost of Sanskrit dramatists, refers to Bhasa as the most eminent of his predecessors. When, in 1910, manuscripts of thirteen Sanskrit plays clearly of an early date were recovered, these were with highly unsatisfactory evidence ascribed to him. No other name having been associated with them, this most conjectural ascription has at least sufficed for pragmatic librarians, whatever reservations a more exacting scholarship may possess. In any case, virtually nothing is known of him. Quite possibly the plays are by several hands. Certainly wide differences exist between them. They may also derive from different periods of Indian literary and dramatic history. Virtually all critics agree in believing them the oldest complete plays that Asia has left us. Recently there has been a tendency for scholars to think them even older than at first presumed. Any of them may without violence to possibility be dated from two to three centuries B.C or two to three centuries A.D. The latitude in chronology, to repeat, is uncommonly wide.

Of greater interest is the trend in recent critical evaluation which places a higher estimate upon them than was at first generally granted. The court drama as written from the fourth to the tenth century is found by some to be over-ripe and too highly mannered. Its erotic seasoning is unquestionably strong. Only two of the so-called Bhasa plays in this regard at all

as a theme with variation. Two make the ironical, frustrating and tragic point far more forcefully than one. The fourth episode, up to this stage of the drama the most intense in emotion and vivid in realization of poetry, depicts the manner in which a true hero faces violence and war. *Karna's Task*, as its title indicates, relates to the hero, Karna, but the dominant thought is in fact that of the *Bhagavad-Gita;* it is essentially a philosophical drama, based on the most celebrated philosophical episode of the great epic. In other words, this is Bhasa's *Bhagavad-Gita*, Karna here ironically taking the place of his adversary, Arjuna, as depicted in the earlier poem. The final play presents the denouement of the epic, the death of Duryodhana, leader of the Kurus, and, in close relation to this event, the destruction by mutual enmity of all leaders in both factions. In short, fratricidal war (the phrase is Bhasa's) terminates in destruction and annihilation. The problem posed by *The Five Nights* is thus resolved on the note of tragedy.

Crucial in the development of the Bhasa story is the role of the youthful Abhimanyu, the figure in whom most clearly the blood-relationship of the two factions is seen. He represents also youth victimized by age, an epitome of the pathetic as Duryodhana is of the tragic. The treatment of this role both spiritually and theatrically is probably the most brilliant and moving feature of Bhasa's work. It should further be noted that Karna's failure in militant spirit arises directly from his realization that he stands in blood relation to both factions. To shed the blood of either is to shed his own. How noble is this conception !

A close examination of the lyrical passages with which the first and last of the five plays open makes it impossible, I believe, to hold that they are not written in relation to each other. In each case there are three participants who chant alternately and in chorus. One episode is a hymn to peace and joy, the other, a hymn to war and death. One describes a religious sacrifice with a holy fire at its center. The other

depicts the tragic sacrifice of war with the fires of battle as its theme. One is performed by priests, the other by soldiers. Even in their imagery the episodes share a common technique. Each mounts to a climax from which it descends. In each case a leading theme in the imagery is artfully cultivated; in the first instance, the leading image is the sacred flame, in the second, the storm-encompassed mountains that suggest the monstrosity of the conflict. It is hard to believe that one scene is in imitation of the other. It is hard to believe that the two scenes are not intended for a single performance and not written by the same hand.

As for the English renderings here provided, the matter of the verse calls for prior attention. The Sanskrit drama, which is unquestionably poetic, shares in both a sophisticated element and a folk element, in tragic profundity and poetic nuance on the one hand and in folk directness and simplicity on the other. Hence it resembles much of the best verse of the Middle Ages in the West. So as an English verse form a scheme of rhythm and rhyme has been chosen familiar chiefly in popular and ballad writing of the period extending from the times of Chaucer to those of Shakespeare. Something like it is found in George Chapman's famous translation of the *Iliad*, so well attuned to the grave and spacious epic spirit. In other words, an effort has been made to suggest the vigor of the imaginative style of the original while maintaining a comparatively simple and forthright manner as well as one agreeable to the spoken idiom of the stage.

In the English rendering the entire project is carried out with the thought of a practicable stage production. The test of unity or disunity in the sequence of plays presents primarily a theatrical and not a merely literary problem.

It is true that any of the five plays may be presented separately with good effect. Each is provided with the usual preliminary prayer. Historically speaking, many "acts" of

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THE FRATRICIDAL WAR

Five works by Bhasa,
based on the Mahabharata
Rendered into English Verse

by

Henry W. Wells

THE FIVE NIGHTS
POTSHERD AS ENVOY
THE EMBASSY
KARNA'S TASK
THE BROKEN THIGHS

CHARACTERS

Stage Manager; Three Brahmans
Bhishma, old warrior of the Kurus
Drona, old preceptor of the Kurus and the Pandavas
Duryodhana, eldest of the Kuru princes, son of Dhritarashtra
Karna, king of the Angas, half-brother of the Pandavas, son of Kunti
Kunti, a Pandava queen
Sakuni, prince of Gandhara, uncle of the Kuru princes
Servant of the Kurus; Messengers; Old Cowherd
Gomitraka, young cowherd
Soldier, Jayasena
Chamberlain of the Virata palace
King Virata
Yudhishthira, disguised as Bhagavan, king of the Pandavas
Attendant on Virata; Charioteer of Virata
Arjuna, disguised as Brihannala, a great archer
Bhima, or Bhimasena, Pandu warrior
Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son
Uttara, Virata's son
Charioteer of the Kurus
Krishna, also called Vasudeva, Narayana or Vishnu, an incarnate deity
Sudarsana, Vishnu's Discus
Dhritarashtra, old blind king of the Kurus
Gandhari, wife of Dhritarashtra
Duhsala, Dhritarashtra's daughter
Portress
Duhsasana, one of Dhritarashtra's hundred sons
Potsherd, also Ghatotkaca, son of Bhima and the giantess Hidimba
Salya, king of the Madras
Indra, disguised as a brahman, storm-god
Angel, disguised as a brahman
Assistant to the Stage Manager; Three Soldiers of Duryodhana's army
Baladeva, or Balarama, Wielder of the Plow, elder brother of Krishna
Malavi, one of Duryodhana's queens
Pauravi, another of Duryodhana's queens
Durjaya, Duryodhana's son
Asvatthama, son of the old preceptor, Drona

I

THE FIVE NIGHTS

Prologue

(*Enter the Stage Manager*)

S. M.

May the illustrious Krishna protect you day and night,
Cloud-born messenger to earth, terrible and bright,
His vehicle the king of birds, Geruda, lord of war,
And yet to sacrifice and peace devoted even more.

(*Exit.*)

Act One

Prelude

(*Enter three Brahmans*)

All.

How lavish is the Kuru king's magnificent sacrifice !

First B.

All the air is fragrant with perfumes of flowers and spice.
Blossoms from the aisles of trees make a superb oblation;
Tigers are mild as deer and mountain-lions void of vexation.
By the consecration-rite that here is celebrated
Not the king only but the world, it seems, is dedicated.

Second B.

True ! And Fire, the chief of gods, it seems, is satisfied
While all the noble, twice-born souls are wholly gratified.
Cattle, birds and men are now alike content,
Rejoicing in this blessed hour of the king's sacrament.
By his high virtues all the world is the gods' dwelling-place.
Here are the noble brahmans, honored for lore and grace.
Although their tortured bodies are torn by bitter stings
Their feet are chaffed by diadems worn by prostrate kings.

Aged priests, their faces grave from austerities,
Place on their students' shoulders rough hands and walk with ease,
Resembling aged elephants with slow and stately tread.

All.

Ho ! acolytes, you must not let the ritual fires go dead !

First B.

See how the lads are careless! All around is bright
With torch-light on the golden post illumining the night,
But sacred fire must not allow the common fires to creep
Up to its side, as twice-born men are disallowed to keep
Churls company. The altar now is only lightly smutched
By burning of the sacred grass. The smoke has barely touched
The circle of the bamboo grove to which the thick clouds come
As the gray-coated elephants seek out the lotus bloom.

Second B.

Just so ! The priests ward off the common from the holy flame
As kinsmen shun their kinsmen who have come to evil fame.

Third B.

Look now on the other side. The barrow full of butter
Sizzles with redoubled flame sprinkled with holy water.
Just so a wretched mother whom fate has cheated of
Her child, though drenched in bitter tears burns all the more with love.

First B.

It's true. The sacrificial fire leaps at the emperor's cart,
Placed as an offering; now burns low, but now begins to dart,
Fanned by the wind; around its wheel the wild tongues flash and run
Making the circle of the rim the image of the sun.

Second B.

Now look there ! Five snakes at once, whom smoke and terror daze,
Issue from an ant-hill's base, fleeing the deadly blaze,

So the five senses, in themselves all pure and sanctified,
Issue from the putrid corpse of one who just has died.

Third B.

But look again ! Those birds that nested in that hollow tree
Wherein the sacrificial fires now burn incessantly,
Having escaped their former world, that everlasting death,
In the free wind are quaffing the spirit's vital breath.

First B.

These bamboo swaying in the wind, burning now low, now high,
Fluctuate in the fire as good men's fortunes rise or die.

Third B.

Well said ! And see that tree whose growth the vines bring to a halt
Even as a good man's growth is checked by a bad woman's fault !

First B.

Now look again ! For after the sacred, wandering fire
Has feasted on this forest, quenching its heart's desire,
Consuming shrubs and bushes, tall trees even to their tips,
It seeks the sacred stream to cleanse its fingers and its lips.

Second B.

I note the same. For now the fire commences to abate.
From tree to tree its wild robe flew, frantic and elate.
That plantain drops as over-ripe; that palm-tree with its stacks
Of honeyed hives at length burns low and falls like Kudru's ax.

Third B.

Ah, now the holy flame dies down, much as a good man's wrath.
The force of fire is ended, lacking fuel for its path,
Just as a noble person no longer can dispense,
When fallen upon poverty, his old munificence.

First B.

Across the bowls and ladles and sacred fire-sticks flows
The ritual flame, as men, whom vice brings low, consume their clothes.

Second B.

This flaming forest-bough dips in the stream one leafy hand
Making libation for great trees that now no longer stand.

Third B.

Come, then, and let us also perform our own ablution
As nature beckons us to do in her divine profusion.

The Other Two.

Fellow brahman, you say well, this is what we shall do.

(*They all dip their hands in the water*)

First B.

But see, the Kuru lord, great Duryodhana, comes in view,
With Bhishma and with Drona and all the Kuru kings
While the peace-loving citizenry thus opportunely sings:
'Blest with religious sacrifice, the meek shall win the earth,
Valor is in peace, wherefrom all virtues have their birth.
So let us pay homage to our Pandava enemies,
Our former anger burned away, like sacrificial trees.'
Come then, let us await the joy auspicious time will bring
And hail our Kuru monarch!

The Other Two.

Good!

All Together.

Victory to the king!

(*Exeunt Omnes.*)

(*Enter Bhishma and Drona.*)

Drona.

My thanks are due to Duryodhana who upholds the ends
Of law. The pupil's fault comes home to the teacher, while his friends
And kin are blameless. When his parents early hand him on
To a preceptor, they may claim their duty has been done.

Bhishma.

Here is Duıyodhana, who in early life
Drained the dregs of infamy by frantic love of strife,
Amassing wealth and eminence but now at last we find
By honoring law and virtue he shows another mind.

(*Enter Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni.*)

Dur.

At last my soul is confident, my teacher satisfied.
The world is reassured. My evil ways are rectified.
Only the dead gain heaven, they say, and win to heavenly powers,
But heaven's fruit is peace and truth in this fair world of ours.

Karna.

Son of Gandhari, you were wise in lavishing your store
Justly acquired, for warriors depend on shafts of war
As priests depend on treasures which to their coffers flow.
A king should give his children nothing but a bow.

Sakuni.

The Anga king speaks rightly. The Ikshvaku kings of old
Amassed in mighty kingdoms great treasuries of gold.
All the kings have perished. Not one is now alive.
By sacrifices only these noble lords survive.

All Together.

Lord of the sacrifice, great king, to you our praise is due.

Dur.

Thanks, princes ! My preceptor, my first salute to you !

Drona.

Come, my son, this order violates propriety !

Dur.

What is the rightful order, then, good Drona?

Drona.

Don't you see ?
This god in human form should first receive your salutation.
You should pay Bhishma reverence, according to his station.

Bhishma.

No, not so, good Drona. I am a man-at-arms,
Accustomed to contention and war's profane alarms,
But you are our preceptor, scholar of peace and truth,
You are divine, we born of earth, your pupils from our youth.

Drona.

Great-souled men cannot praise themselves. Come, son, and
honor me !

Dur.

Preceptor, I salute you !

Drona.

Come nearer reverently.
I bless you and adjure you, may your sacrifices tire you !

Dur.

I thank you.—Grandsire Bhishma, I honor and admire you !

Bhishma.

Come to me, my grandson ! May your spirit never be
In passion or confusion but win tranquillity !

Dur.

I thank you, sire. And now, my warrior uncle, praise to you !
What is the wisest counsel that you have now in view?

Sakuni.

My child, having completed all rituals and rites
And having conquered all the kings and all their valiant knights,
Invite a vast assembly for your coronation here
As usurper Jarasandha summoned in a former year.

Drona.

Ah ! even while he gives his benediction Sakuni,
The evil one, excites ambition, strife and treachery !

Dur.

Karna, having now saluted all these older men
In ritual order, I return, my friend, to you again.

Karna.

Gandhari's son ! These ritual vows have made your body thin
Yet I know you cannot think my strong embrace to be a sin.
You are lusty always, yet some serious fears engage
My heart when hearing solemn people call you " Royal Sage. "

Dur.

May you always feel so !

Drona.

Son Duryodhana, view
King Bhismaka, loved by Indra, here come to honor you.

Dur.

(*to an imagined figure*) Welcome, prince ! I greet you.

Bhishma.

Grandson, this is king
Bhurisravas, iron bolt and bar to Deccan's portals,
Honoring your sacrifice offered the immortals.

Dur.

(*to an imagined figure*) Welcome, prince !

Drona.

Vasubhadra, honoring your oblations
Has sent young Abhimanyu with his felicitations.

Sakuni.

Duryodhana, let me next bring Jarasandha's child,
Honoring you, Shakadeva, young and undefiled.

Dur.

Come, my boy, may you grow up even as your father grew !

All.

This royal gathering of kings has some to honor you.

Dur.

I thank you all. But if these kings have freely gathered here,
Why does our friendly neighbor, king Virata, not appear ?

Sakuni.

I have sent him urgent messengers. I believe him on his way.

Dur.

Now, Drona, my preceptor, to whom we always pay
Honor, as one who teaches us alike in peace and war,
Tell me what gift I can bestow that you are wishing for ?

Drona.

A gift? Yes, there is something which I desire indeed.

Dur.

What can a true sage ask for ?

Bhishma.

What can a scholar need ?
When he has drunk the sacramental potions in his youth,
When honors have attended him, richest in moral truth,
When all these things are granted him, how can he long for more,
How can a guide to warriors, a brahman, still be poor ?

Dur.

Command me, reverend brahman, tell me what I can do
To give you joy.

Drona.

Son Duryodhana, I shall answer you.—

Dur.

Why, master, do you hesitate and why are you constrained ?
I am more dear to you than life and from you I have gained
My wisdom and my valor and so rank among the great.
Since to you I am owing for all I treasure, state
What I may freely give you. While this mace rests in my hand
You may have whatever your wishes may demand.

Drona.

My son, I would gladly tell you but my tears fall like the rain.

All.

What ? is the master weeping ?

Bhishma.

Son, your trouble is in vain.

Dur.

Ho there ! I call for service ! (*Enter servant.*)

Ser.

To the great king, victory !

Dur.

Bring me water.

Ser.

Sire, I'll bring it quickly as can be.

(*Exit and re-enters.*)

Victory to my sovereign ! Here's the water-bowl you wish.

Dur.

Hand it to me. Now, my master, dipping in the dish
Cleanse your tear-stained face, as these festivities require.

Drona.

Bless you, son, this act of cleansing most fulfills my heart's desire.

Dur.

If you doubt my freeborn offer, clasp the hand I give you here.
Let the purifying water make my true intentions clear !

Drona.

Ah, my heart is now relieved and all my hesitancies cease:
Share your throne with the Pandavas, grant those homeless warriors peace !
This is the reward I beg you.

Sakuni (*excitedly*).

No, peace-loving idiot, no !
Would you make this day of truce the Kuru kingdom's overthrow?
Would you mulct us of our freedom with a foul religious fraud,
Cozening your pious pupil, overwhelmed and overawed ?

Drona.

'Religious fraud,' you say ? You speak, Sakuni, to your shame.
Dishonorable yourself, you think that all men are the same.
Is it fraud to give our cousins what should come them in due course ?
Is it better to restore it than for them to take by force?

All.

What? By force !

Bhishma.

Listen, my grandson ! Justice is our only end.
Do not listen to Sakuni, who has never been our friend.
If today Pandava leaders with Drupada's daughter must
Roam in exile through the desert, covered with the desert's dust,
And if brother turns on brother in these harsh and cruel times,
It is all because Sakuni once committed hateful crimes.

Dur.

It may be so, but, preceptor, one odd question vexes me.
May I put it to you, master ?

Drona.

State your question, clear and free.

Dur.

When defeated at the gambling and the dice showed no remorse,
Why did they restrain their anger, as incapable of force ?

Drona.

You should ask king Yudhishthira whose devotion at the dice
Led him first to his destruction through Sakuni's foul device,
But whose love of peace induced him to check Bhima's arm when all
Of us there alike had perished in the crushing of the hall.
In his giant strength prince Bhima measured with his mighty arm
All its pillars but his kindly king in mercy took alarm.
Had the king not spoke that moment, with the roof about to bow,
All had died and foul Sakuni would not think to chide us now.

Bhishma.

One thing is proposed, preceptor, and another comes about.
Let the past be passed and likewise rule our present quarrel out.

Drona.

No, good Bhishma, let us boldly carry on with our dispute.

Bhishma.

Peace, preceptor ! Look, my grandson, they are wholly destitute,
Powerless, miserable, wandering, in exile, hid from view,
Nonetheless they humbly seek conciliation here with you.
You are oldest and most favored. Will you have them at the feast
In our household or still leave them to remain with birds and beasts ?

Sakuni.

Let them stay there, let them stay there !

Karna.

Good preceptor, don't be rash !
When provoked by bitter counsel, Duryodhana can be brash
In his youthful, arrogant manners and his temper ill can brook
Laud of other men, whose praises he interprets a rebuke.
Have a care now with your pupil lest his good intention halts.
He must now be guided gently like an elephant with faults.

Drona.

My son Karna, a good brahman, gentle and compssionate,
It was timely to remind me that my anger should abate.
See, I follow your suggestion.—Duryodhana, tell me now,
Am I teacher and preceptor at whose counsel you should bow ?

Bhishma.

Now he speaks in the true manner, for conciliation is
The only rightful cure for crude misconduct such as his.

Dur.

You are not my teacher only but the guide to all my clan.

Drona.

That is worthy of you, pupil. So be patient as you can.
If it's I who have deceived you, that is then no fault in you.
From the trouble that I cause you only virtue can accrue.
The dissensions in great houses are dispelled by moral law.

Dur.

So I wish to have good counsel.

Drona.

I receive your word with awe.
But with whom should I take counsel? You mean Bhishma or mean Karna,
With what king, or you perhaps mean the Sindh's lord, Jayadratha ?
Or my own son, or Vidura, or your father or your mother,
Speak, my son, with whom ? Is it with these or any other ?

Dur.

No, I would take counsel with Sakuni.

Drona. O, our task
Now is hopeless if it's him, your uncle, you're disposed to ask.

Dur.

Come, uncle, come to me; and you, too, come, friend Karna.

Drona (*aside*).

I know now what to do.—Come here, king of Gandhara !

Sakuni.

Well, I am here.

Drona.

My son, old age plagues me with this increase
Of rashness; please forgive me; let my warm embrace bring peace !

Bhishma (*aside*).

See the kind master soothing his son, but nevertheless
Sakuni feigns forgiveness and thrives on crookedness.

Sakuni (*aside*).

The brahman is a rogue and coaxes me to go his way.

(*All walk about and sit down.*)

Dur.

Shall we give to the Pandavas half our spacious realm today?

Sakuni.

It should not be given. Why yield what was bravely won ?

Dur.

Yet my natural brother might say it should be done.

Sakuni.

If you give half your realm away, then why not give the rest ?

Why ask me ?

Dur.

Dear Karna, what do you consider best ?

Karna.

What shall I say?—Since Rama gave his younger brother all
His huge kingdom, I say nothing. Such a serious choice must fall
Upon you. We only aid you when your enemies rebel.

Dur.

Uncle, name some desert where Pandava chiefs might dwell.

Sakuni.

My answer is that grain will grow if Yudhishthira's there.
The only desert fit for such a foe is empty air.

Dur.

But now that I poured water in my preceptor's hand
And all the princes heard my oath, heard it and understand,
It were impolitic for me to change my point of view.
I have no other choice except to make my swearing true.

Sakuni.

So you do not wish to break your word ?

Dur.

That's so.

Sakuni.

Then come with me.

(*They go toward Drona.*)

This is the word, preceptor, given by his majesty.

Drona.

Prince of Gandhara, tell me.

Sakuni.

If in five days come
Tidings from the Pandavas, you then may bring them home.

Drona.

No, no, you deal in trickery. How dubious it appears
That you in five days could bring men vanished for twelve long years!

In a word, your prayer's not granted.

Bhishma.

Grandson, always do what's fair.
Divide with the Pandavas in just and equal share.
Fulfill your promise strictly for it is long averred
That the proud Kuru monarchs have ever kept their word.

Dur.

That is my decision.

Drona (*aside*).

Eagerness makes me wish I could
Be Hanuman, the monkey-king, who lept across the flood
Bringing back his message of Sita from afar.
How can I bring tidings of where Pandavas are?

(*Enter a Servant.*)

Ser.

To the great king, victory! The courier comes home
From king Virata's capital.

All.

Bid him quickly come!

Ser.

As you command. (*Exit. Enter the Messenger.*)

Mess.

King, victory !

All.

Is king Virata here ?

Mess.

Since the great king's in mourning, he cannot now appear.

All.

Why is he in mourning ?

Mess.

This generous-hearted man
Claimed as kin the hundred brothers known as the Bamboo Clan.
One night they all were slaughtered, crushed as powdered stone,
By one alone and naked, utterly unknown.

All.

What, was the victor weaponless ?

Bhishma (*aside to Drona*).

Agree to the five days !

Drona.

Why, dear Bhishma, should this be?

Bhishma.

These alone are Bhima's ways
Of fighting, who with naked arms does more than others do
With all their shining weapons. Now peace comes at last in view.
The hundred brothers dead spare Duryodhana's hundred brothers,
So well I know Bhima's huge arms distinguished from all others.

Drona.

How know ?

Bhishma.

Why, sage, if calves stray off among the brush and thorns
Will not the old bulls know them by the marks upon their horns ?

Drona.

'Old bulls,' you say.—It's done.—My son, I grant you the five days.
This is a faultless strategy redounding to our praise.

Dur.

Five days; so be it; all is well !

Drona.

Hear all you noble kings—
Gracing the Kuru sacrifice, the news your sovereign brings—
No, not himself alone, but with his uncle Sakuni—
They in five days and five short nights will set Pandavas free
From any further exile and grant them half their sway.
Is this not so, Duryodhana ?

Dur.

Precisely as you say.

Drona.

Ponder this a second time, yea, think on it a third.

Sakuni.

I shall know when these times are past. With all that you averred.

Drona.

What do you say, dear Bhishma ?

Bhishma (*aside*).

If Drona shows delight
Too clearly, I am prone to fear his day may turn to night,
Duryodhana may himself be miserably deceived
And all the Kuru nation be miserably grieved.
(*aloud*) Duryodhana, grandson, I have a secret feud
With this king Virata. Let our fighting be renewed
By sudden, bold attack in raiding of his cattle.

Drona (*aside to Bhishma*).

King Virata is my scholar. So why provoke a battle ?

Bhishma (*aside to Drona*).

Honest-hearted brahman, unskilled in ways of state !
Deafened by din of battle, the Pandavas will debate
Our coming and so show themselves exposed in open light
Of battle, then no longer lurking in affright.
Besides, they are great-hearted and loved the Bamboo Clan.

Ser.

Victory to the king of kings ! Each chariot and each man
Is marshaled for the entry to your city, line on line.

Dur.

Then with these very chariots let us raid Virata's kine !
The mace that rested at my side throughout the sacrifice
Shall come again into my hand that grasps it as a vice.

Drona.

So let the people bring my car !

Sakuni.

Bring me my elephant !

Karna.

Bring me my chariot with the steeds whose nostrils heave and pant !

Bhishma.

My heart yearns for the battle. Bring me my shafts and bow !

All.

No, eldest of the Kuru clan, you stay and we shall go.

Drona.

So, Duryodhana, two old men show valor, as they ought.

Dur.

Sakuni, lead the cattle raid !

Sakuni.

Cousin, a timely thought.

Drona.

Let us all ride together to act our violent scenes;
Ours is factitious warfare. Ends justify the means.

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

Act Two

(The scene is laid in the Virata Country.)

Interlude

(Enter an old Cowherd.)

Old. C.

May cattle never lack their calves nor married girls their men,
May king Virata rule the earth in endless regimen,
He who will give us cows today for his high festival !
This is why we herd our beasts outside the city wall,
With our lads and lasses flaunting their finest dress;
I myself shall enter where merrymakers press. (*looking around*)
Why is that evil-omened crow perched on this withered tree,
Rubbing his beak and croaking in the sunlight ominously ?—
Peace be here to all men and peace be to the herd !
I must find the dancing-leader to hear what has occurred.
(*walks about*) Hello, Gomitraka ! (*Enter Gomitraka.*)

Gom.

What does the old man say ?

Old C.

Peace be to men and cattle on this auspicious day !
Yes, I am also gay and would do anything for you.
Come Gorakshinika, Ghritapinda, Kumbhadatta,
Svamini, Vrishabhadatta and young Mahishadatta,
Come, hurry here, come hurry ! (*Enter the merrymakers.*)

All.

Grandpa, good day to you !

Old C.

Peace be to us and all our herds, our lads and lasses, too !
The king is giving cattle for his birthday festival.
Here we are gathered gaily beneath the city wall.
Meanwhile let's have some carols, some dancing and some singing.

(*They all dance.*)

All.

As father asks.

Old C.

Well danced, well sung ! And while the air is ringing
I'll dance and sing myself at once to prove that I am lusty.

All.

Grandfather, what a show you make ! Your clothes are blown
and dusty.

Old C.

There's more than dust. I hear at once the roar of horns and
drums.

All.

No, father, those are only dreams, for here no violence comes.
Dusk is gently falling down at setting of the sun.

Gom.

Look ! father, those war chariots and horsemen overrun
Our camp. Grim thieves pursue us, slashing us with cuts
Of sword and sabre.—Lads and lasses, quickly to your huts !

Old C.

Oho, a flight of arrows ! How they hum and sing !
We must report this matter to Virata, our king !

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter a Soldier.*)

Sold.

Ho there ! stop them, stop them ! take word to king Virata
That those cows are being lifted by the sons of Dhritarashtra,
Concealing warlike valor in a low disguise as thieves.—
Herds are in agitation. This sudden foray leaves
Scampering calves, frightened cows and bulls, with wild despair,
In frantic perturbation rending the startled air.

Voice (*behind the scenes*).

'By the sons of Dhritarashtra.'

Chamberlain (*Entering*).

That is like enough,
For they ride with shining armor, arrow-guards on arm and cuff,
Long-bows strung, their chariots racing, while these riots and these rows
Only wreak their feuds with princes by avenging them on cows !—
Jayasena, do not trouble to announce this to our king;
It would merely mar his birthday to apprise him of this thing.
Tell him only of some tumult after setting of the sun.

Sold.

But the case is very urgent.—As you bid, it shall be done.

(*Exeunt.*)

King (*entering*).

Wretched day ! My cows are stolen while the young steers rush about
Tormented by the chariots' roar and the shrill battle-shout.
All the while my strong right arm, which might have grasped the bow,
Is jingling with its bracelets, wet with sandal glow,
While I feast upon these dainties. Jayasena, come to me !

Sold.

I am hastening to attend you. To the great king, victory !

King.

Spare your ' great king, ' honest soldier, for I'm buried in a flood
Of disasters and my royal name is smutched with vilest mud.—
Tell me the details of battle.

Sold.

All the cattles' limbs are smashed;
All their sides are parti-colored where their dusty wounds are lashed.

King.

Friend, make my chariot ready, for we shall have a kill,
And any man who loves me may come at his free will.
Let us struggle for our cattle, never deigning to withdraw.
If we lose, there will be glory; if we win, we guard the law.

Sold.

As your Majesty commands me. (*Exit.*)

King. Now I truly wonder why
Duryodhana so attacks me and so runs the risk to die ?
Is it only that I did not join his sacrifice ? But then,
How could I attend his service, grieving for the Bamboo Men ?
Or perhaps he thinks I secretely espouse the Pandu cause ?
In any case, I now must fight and so uphold the laws.
Now, Bhagavan, our guest, knows Duryodhana's mind, since he
Lived long at Hastinapura, yet I think reluctantly
Will he ever tell me truly the great king's weaknesses,
But I shall sound him deeply in this matter, nevertheless.
Ho, my servant ! (*Enter a Servant*)

Ser.

To the great king, victory !

King.

Just tell Bhagavan to enter.

Ser.

As your Highness orders me !

(*Enter Bhagavan, who is Yudhishthira in disguise.*)

Bhag.

Ah, what's this? Huge elephants are harnessed, head to tail;
Captains of horse are readying themselves in heavy mail;
Chariots are yoked, foot soldiers tighten up their gear.
Seeing this preparation, I am struck with sudden fear,
Yet my brothers are more mutable and less resolved than I.—
Greetings, my king !

King.

And greetings, Bhagavan, I, too, reply.

Bhag.

Bless you, king !

King.

I thank you ! Here's a seat; sit down, I pray.

Bhag.

What is all this stir and tumult and this militant display ?
Is your Majesty dissatisfied, or is your force addressed
To overthrow the arrogant or rescue the oppressed ?

King.

Bhagavan, I've been insulted by the raiding of my cattle.

Bhag.

Who have done this ?

King.

Dhritarashtra's sons.

Bhag.

Ah, that portends a battle !
(*aside*). In this world of clan and family there is always much to rue
When our kin do wrong, for then, it seems, that we have trespassed too.

King.

Bhagavan, what are you brooding on ?

Bhag.

Ah, nothing. But I'm grieved.

King.

From this day on your trouble, Bhagavan, will be relieved.
Yudhishthira might forgive them but I am not so mild.

Bhag.

That is so, my lord. (*aside*) Ah, blessed words, now I am reconciled.
A couch of leaves upon the ground, my kingdom's total loss,
Draupadi dragged about the floor, our days reduced to dross,
Losing our identity by living here disguised—
All is nothing now my clemency is recognized !

(*Enter an Attendant.*)

Att.

To the great king, victory !

King.

Where is Dudyodhana now ?

Att.

Not Duryodhana only but all earth's kings, I vow,
Have come with him. Here's Drona, Salya, Bhishma,
Sakuni, Jayadratha, Karna and king Kripa.—
No need of arrows. We are spent, a very field of scars,
Merely crushed by streaming banners, bruised by rattling cars !

King (*Rising and folding his hands*).

What, has royal Bhishma come beneath their craven banners ?

Bhag.(*aside*).

Good ! Although insulted, he does not transgress in manners.
Why is now the noblest of all the Kurus come ?
I suppose he will remind me that our promise calls us home.

King.

Ho, my servant ! Enter quickly !

Ser.

To the great king, victory !

King.

Call my charioteer here to me.

Ser.

He shall come immediately.

(*Exit Servant: enter Charioteer.*)

Char.

Long live the king !

King.

Go swiftly, bring my strongest battle-car;
A noble battle-guest has come, the best of all that are,
Bhishma shall have sharp arrows to answer his desire,
Although to vanquish him is more than I myself require.

Char.

As the king requires me ! (*Goes and returns*). Long live your Majesty !

The chariot you so often used to crush your enemy
Is given to prince Uttara, hard on your enemy's track.

King.

What, has the prince, our son, gone out ?

Bhag.

O king, command him back !
Youth makes him keen for battle and ignorant of fear.
There is no fire in battle that does not burn when near.
It is not from disrespect that I have told you this.

King.

Then get another chariot to plunge through war's abyss.

Char.

As the king orders.—

King.

No, but stop !—

Char.

Yes, master, I am here.

King.

Why was it you yourself were not the prince's charioteer ?
Did he dismiss you? Are you not our charioteer in chief ?

Char.

Do not be angry, Majesty ! I had a strange relief.
When I prepared the chariot, as I so well am used,
Be it for a jest or not, Uttara refused
My service and—it seems to me—his judgment in a whirl,
Chose for his favored driver Brihannala, that half-girl.

King.

What, Brihannala, did you say ?

Bhag.

King do not be alarmed.
If Brihannala rides with him, he never can be harmed.
The very dust that car shall raise itself defeats the foe;
No arrow shall be needed where those great fellies go.

King.

Well, fetch another chariot !

Char.

At your Majesty's command ! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter a Soldier.*)

Sold.

The prince's chariot is smashed !

King.

I cannot understand.
What ? You say smashed ?

Bhag.

How was it smashed ?

Sold.

Will the great king hear
My message without anger, though tragedy seems near ?
Many foes, expert in war, compelled them to give ground;
The car was quickly shattered against the burial mound.

Bhag. (*aside*).

That's where Arjuna hid his bow.—King, fortune changes face;
The ground where now those Kurus stand shall be their burying-place.

King.

Brahman, your cool, untimely words anger me with you.

Bhag.

Do not feel so ! When have I spoken words that proved untrue ?

King.

Yes, that is so. (*to the soldier*) Go, bring more news.

Sold.

I answer your commands.

King.

What is that thunder now that seems to shake the sky and land ?
It is like a torrent risen in wild uproar.

(*Re-enter the Soldier.*)

Sold.

Victory, king, victory ! All is different than before !
From the burial-ground we saw, after a little pause,
A miracle accomplished aiding your royal cause.

Bhag.

May he not make my own words false !

King.

What did Uttara do ?

Sold.

My story is incredible and yet I swear it true.
He made the dark-blue elephants tawny with his darts,
Countless steeds and warriors smitten to their hearts.
Chariots are pinned with arrows. The air is all aglow
With arrows poured on arrows, streaming from his bow.

Bhag. (*aside*).

These are the magic arrows that, shot with might and main,
Saved a forest burning, as drops of Indra's rain.

King.

What is the foe's condition ?

Sold.

My story must be short.
I was not there to see them but give the scout's report.
Hearing the twanging bowstring, Drona at once withdrew,
Bhishma looked on an arrow, cried ' Enough, ' and passed from view.
Karna, whelmed by arrows, exclaimed, ' What can it be ? '
All the men were routed save one, who did not flee
But being young, scorned danger; that man, as I learned since,
Was the youthful, sacred hero, Abhimanyu, the prince.

Bhag.

What, has Abhimanyu come ? Then, pray you, be discreet.
If he within whose blood alone Pandu and Kuru meet
Is in the battle, send with haste a second charioteer,
For Brihannala facing him will hesitate from fear.

King.

Do not say that, Bhagavan ! If he has driven back
Bhishma, where Rama's arrows were even found to lack
The power to pierce his armor, Karna, whose magic mail
Rejects the keenest weapons, forcing them to fail,
Haughty Jayadratha and all those other kings,
Will he not easily overcome the strength a youngster brings ?
Does the youth's father's prowess make this man afraid ?
Again, since in this mold of youth both warriors are made,
Perhaps he'll spare the stripling out of companionship.

Sold.

King, the prince's chariot moves without a whip,
Swiftly as a dancer, draws near, then speeds afar,
Approaches one contender, then braves a second car.
The veering of his chariot makes us almost say
That fighting is not deadly but only done in play.

King.

Go, bring the latest message.

Sold.

Even as the great king wills !
(*Exit and Re-enters.*)
Victory to the great king ! You may drink your utmost fill
Of triumph, king Virata. Your victory is won.
The cattle-raid defeated; the foe fled, every one !

Bhag.

You have been most fortunate.

King.

Ah, that is due to you !
Where is the prince Uttara, whom I so long to view ?

Sold.

The prince is now recording the valiant deeds he saw
Done by his companions in the flood-tide of war.

King.

Well done ! For when a warrior after fighting finds his pain
Reported by the singers, his heart revives again.
But where is Brihannala, whose valor did not fail ?

Sold.

Gone to the ladies' quarters to tell this joyful tale.

King.

Send for Brihannala.

Sold.

As you command, I go ! (*Exit.*)

(*Enter Brihannala, Arjuna disguised.*)

Bri. (*aside*).

I had to strain my arm in stringing the Gandiva bow.
My fist in handling arrows was awkward and unsure.
My bow-arm lacked its suppleness, dexterous no more,
Made languid by a woman's life, I strung my bow in vain,
But soon by practice I resumed my soldier-self again.—
I plied my bow, though this disguise shamed me in the field.
But soon the blood and heavy dust fell on me as a shield.
Though I have got the cattle back I did not win the day,
Failing to seize the Kuru king in forefront of the fray.
Decked in the gems the princess gave as tokens of her grace,
I am ashamed to look great king Virata in the face.
So on Yudhishthira I turn inquiring eyes.
Ah, king of the Pandavas, humbled in disguise !
So young and yet a forest-saint, turning from war and strife,
Living in fragrant woodlands a brahman's holy life.
Though he bears no longer the sceptre of the king,
He carries an ascetic's staff, truly, a nobler thing !
(*approaching*) Bhagavan, my greetings and my salute to you !

Bhag.

Bless you !

Bri.

Hail, your Majesty !

King.

You have shown it true
That man are judged not by their shape but what their deeds effect.
That very shape we once had scorned now wins profound respect.
Tired as you are from battle, I'll tire you more. Please tell
The conduct of the fighting !

Bri.

This is what befell—

King.

It was a vigorous action; therefore do not suppose
That such can be recited in low and common prose.
Use only verse.

Bri.

My lord, it shall be just as you have willed.—

(*Enter a Soldier.*)

Sold.

Great king, you are victorious !

King.

Speak ! Why are you so thrilled ?

Sold.

Unbelievable ! Your men have captured Abhimanyu !

Bri.

What, captured ! (*aside*) I have weighed his strength against
our host today
And found no soldier matched him in brunt of that affray.
Who could it be that took him, now the Bamboo Clan is slain ?

Bhag.

What can it mean, Brihannala ?

Bri.

I cannot explain.
He was strong and skilfull. The misfortune of his sire
Conceivably has troubled him and caused him to retire.

King.

How was he captured ?

Sold.

All at once while his swift chargers ran
One lifted him in his two arms ?

King.

Who was this powerful man ?

Sold.

The man who in your kitchen is the new scullion.

Bri. (*aside*).

So Bhima has embraced him ! He is the lucky one !
Even at a distance I rejoiced at my son's sight
But it is well one less concerned enjoyed that first delight.

King.

Well then, let Abhimanyu be admitted here.

Bhag.

King, may not people then suppose that this is due to fear
Of honoring a ruler of the Pandava strain ?

King.

To honor such a noble youth does not deserve disdain.
He is child of Yudhishthira, the same age as our son,
We are of Drupada's clan, so he is our grandson,
And soon may be our son-in-law; I have a girl unwed.
He is a worthy guest and from Pandavas nobly bred.

Bhag.

That is so indeed ! But we must think what men will say.

King.

Well, who shall present him here ?

Bhag.

Brihannala may.

King.

Brave Brihannala, pray present Abhimanyu.

Bri. (*aside*).

A joy that I have long desired ! (*to king*) King, that I shall do. (*Exit.*)

Bhag. (*aside*).

Now he may embrace his child and let his tears flow free.
He would be shy of that excess if he were here with me.

King.

Regard the prince's merits ! Kings like Bhishma were undone.
Uttara conquers the whole earth but first this noble one !

(*Enter Bhimasena*)

Bhima.

Out of a blazing palace I lifted on my breast
My brothers and my mother, but this is far the best;
To carry this young champion I find a greater deed,
The epilogue to others that happily precede.

(*Enter Abhimanyu and Brihannala*)

Abh.

Ah, I wonder who he is, whose force is a caress ?
His chest is broad, his waist refined to graceful slenderness.
Shoulders erect and sturdy, thighs huge and buttocks straight,
He lifts me by a single arm and though his strength is great
I am not hurt or bruised at all.

Bri.

Come here, prince !

Abh.

Who is he ?
Adorned with woman's ornaments, this hero seems to me
Like a bull elephant tricked out in trappings of his mate.
Small as he looks in this disguise, his energy is great.
He is like Siva, Lord of Dance, masked as his sprightly queen.

Bri. (*aside to Bhima*).

What have you done, my brother ? Whatever do you mean ?
He is disgraced in being defeated in the war,
His father will be angry and troubled all the more,
Krishna will be angry, too, to hear of his reverse.
In-short, your show of brutal force could hardly have been worse.

Bhima.

Arjuna !

Bri.

What is this you say ? Is this Arjuna's son ?

Bhima.

I recognize the drawbacks but how could anyone
Leave his own child deserted, the conquest of his foes?
I thought the queen should see him, for she is sunk in woes
In longing for her children. All this explains my deed.

Bri. (*aside to Bhima*).

Bhima, my noble brother, I have an urgent need
To talk with him. So may I ? Please make him speak to me !

Bhima.

Very well, Abhimanyu.

Abh.

You use short ceremony !

Bhima.

The prince is angry with me. You address him, too.

Bri.

Abhimanyu !

Abh.

What's this ? Am I 'Abhimanyu' to you ?
Do low caste people so address those of the warrior race ?
Does such curt salutation show the manners of this place ?
Or is this an insult because I lately fell
Your prisoner ?

Bri.

Abhimanyu, is your good mother well ?

Abh.

What ! You speak of my mother? Are you Bhimasena,
The very king of righteousness, or possibly Arjuna,
That you speak as my father might and arrogantly inquire
About the leaders of my house? What is it you desire ?

Brih.

Tell me, is lord Kesava well ? Speak, Abhimanyu. (*They look at each other.*)

Abh.

Why speak of him? He must be well, standing close to you.
Are you not jesting with me ?

No, my friend, not at all.

Bri.

We speak with true sincerity, whatever may befall,
Even if Arjuna be his sire, Janardana of his kin,
Why should defeat in battle be reputed as a sin ?

Abh.

We speak too much. My family does not boast its fame.
On all the arrows of the killed, go, find a single name !

Bri.

(*aside to Bhima*). He tells the truth. In all the throng on horse or chariots
Not one was left unwounded, through the keenness of his shots.
Only by dodging I escaped, his arrows sped so true.
(*aloud*) This is mere bragging. Why should a foot-soldier capture you ?

Abh.

He came unarmed and took me. For how could anyone
Strike a foot-soldier who himself is great Arjuna's son ?

Bhima.

(*aside*). Arjuna is a blessed man observing his son's pride
Of family, equal to his power to stem the battle-tide.

King.

Come to me, Abhimanyu.

Bri.

This way, the king is where I point you.

Abh.

Whose king ?

Bri.

No, no, no; the king is seated there,
Beside a brahman.

Abh.

What, a brahman ! Ah, most reverend man,
I must salute you !

Bhag.

I in turn will bless you as I can
May you attain all virtues gathered into one,
Your father's strength and modesty, kindness and compassion
For all his own, with prowess in arms and deeds of war !
These are the cardinal virtues. Be lavish in all four.

Abh.

I thank you.

King.

Come, my son, how's this? No gracious word to me?
How arrogant this stripling is. We'll teach him courtesy.
Who took him prisoner ?

Bhima.

King, I did.

Abh.

Unarmed, too, you should add.

Bhima.

My two strong arms and shoulders are the weapons that I had.
These are the things to fight with. Weaklings use the bow.

Abh.

That is false, my uncle. You should not say so.
These words apply correctly only to one like him,
Portentous in his stature, mighty in his limb.

Bhag.

My son, who is this middle one of three before you there ?

Abh.

Listen—No, I'll not answer to the brahman I revere.
I should prefer another asked.

King.

Well, then, reply to me.
Who is the middle one, my son?

Abh.

Listen, it is he
Whose arm crushed Jarasandha, putting him to shame,
And by that great action mulcted Krishna of his claim.

King.

Your proud words do not anger me. They give me keenest joy.
What can I say without offense ? How are you, my dear boy ?

Abh.

If you would show me favor, treat me as a victor should,
Fetter me ! Bhima took me as only Bhima could.

(*Enter Uttara.*)

Utt.

This false prince deeply irks me, for when I am proclaimed
The victor in this conflict, it leaves my soul ashamed.—
Bhagavan, I salute you !

Bhag.

Bless you !

Utt.

And father, too,
I greet you !

King.

Son, come to me here. Have you sung the beauty
Of valor in those warriors who did their utmost duty?

Utt.

I have. Now please to honor him who here deserves it most.

King.

Who is that man, my son?

Utt.

It's of Arjuna that I boast.

King.

What ? You say Arjuna ?

Utt.

Yes, from the cemetery
He took his bow and rescued the other kings and me.

King.

Can this be true?

Bri.

It is so. By reason of his youth
He errs, and having done these things fails to see the truth;
Having achieved more valorous deeds than any other can,
He thinks that they are not his own but of another man.

Utt.

You can resolve the question. Look at the hidden scar
His bowstring on his forearm made. Look where old bruises are !

Bri.

This scar was made by bracelets dangling on my arm.
No arrow-guard nor binding did me this minor harm.

King.

Just let me look.

Bri.

Well, if you believe I am in truth the man
You mention, noble Arjun, of the Bharata clan,
Then it is evident this man is Bhimasena
And this Bhagavan is the great king, Yudhishthira.

King.

Yudhishthira ! Arjuna and Bhima, could you not
Trust me in this? Well, yours will now become a happier lot.
Brihannala, go into the inner rooms.

Bri.

Indeed I'll go
Gladly, great king.

Bhag.

No, Arjuna. This should not be so.
Our promise is fulfilled.

Arj.

I'll do whatever you may bid.

King.

Since the Pandava kings, who for so long a time were hid,
Are now revealed and since these men, who keep their oaths,
remain
Guests within my chambers, my house is purged from stain.

Abh.

These are all my kinsmen. This is the reason why
When I consulted them they smiled, making no rough reply.
Bravo ! So the cattle-raid restored me to my kin !
(*to Bhimasena*) Uncle, it was from ignorance, not from any sin
Against the laws of courtesy, that in our talk before
I did not then salute you. This will occur no more.

Bhi.

Come here, my son. May you become as brave as is your sire !

Abh.

Thank you.

Bhi.

Greet your father, child !

Abh.

This is my desire.

Father, I salute you.

Arj.

No, son, let us embrace !

Clasping my dear son's body is my supremest grace
That life can give me, banished from him these thirteen years.
Now, son, salute the valiant king and all his high compeers !

Abh.

My warmest salutations !

King.

Come to me now, dear child !

May you, like Yudhishthira, be patient, gentle, mild,
Yet also like Arjuna be skilfull in the fight

And in the thick of battle be armed with Bhima's might !
May you attain the glory for Madri's sons unfurled,
The glory of Lord Krishna, beloved of all the world!
But still this long relation with my daughter troubles me;
He kept the inner chamber, in fullest intimacy.
What shall I do? I have it now ! He shall wed my daughter !
Ho, servant ! (*Enter Servant.*)

Ser.

Victory to the king !

King.

Go, bring some sacred water !

Ser.

As the king wills. (*Exit and re-enter.*) Sir, here it is, fresh and undefiled.

King. (*taking it*).

Arjuna,for your prize in war accept my dearest child !

Bhag.

Our heads are bowed.

Arj.

He weighs my worth. O noble king, my brother,
All the ladies of your house I honor as my mother;
So I accept your daughter as bride for my young son.

Yud.

We hold our bowed heads up again. A just deed has been done.

King.

Now he is established with men of noble deeds
Who in the inner sanctum answered less glorious needs.

Yud.

The stars are all auspicious. Let the marriage be today !
As envoy to the Kurus let Uttara take his way.

King.

As you suggest. These matters are managed as we would.
Come into my palace ! The times indeed are good.
(*Exeunt omnes.*)

Act Third

(Enter a Chamberlain.)

Cham.

Ho there, tell the warriors whom renowned Drona rules
That the long lost Pandavas have treated us as fools.
Heedless of the terror that Krishna's discs instill,
Utterly defying the Kurus' iron will,
Regardless of our archers, they took Abhimanyu.
Shame upon you warriors, triple shame on you !

(Enter Bhishma and Drona.)

Drona.

Charioteer, come tell me, who took my pupil's son,
So skilled in every battle, tell me how this was done?
Who defies my magic shafts? tell me his armory
And I shall send against him powers terrible to see.

Bhi.

Tell me, tell me, charioteer, how by his youthful force
He kept the field while all his friends followed a backward course ?
Then who was it who captured him as one who on the sly
Captures an infant elephant after the herd goes by ?

(Enter Duryodhana, Karna and Sakuni.)

Dur.

Tell me, charioteer, who captured Abhimanyu
And I myself will set him free. The blame is all my due
Since I commenced the family feud from which these ills began,
So thoughtful men will point me out to be the guilty man.
Besides, I hold him as my son, not as Pandavas claim,
And though there be a family feud, children are not to blame.

Karna.

Your words are very gracious, most timely to enjoy.
Not, I trust, fearing the folk nor thinking him a boy
They captured Abhimanyu in thickest of the strife.—
Let us throw away our arms and choose the hermit's life !

Sak.

The boy has many guardians. He will quickly be released.
Discovering him Arjuna's son, the king will be appeased.
He will think of Krishna, his uncle, whose great might
Can never be resisted; he will recall the fight
Of Krishna's elder brother, ever glorious,
Wielding a plowshare only on the demon Pendulous.
Yes, even mighty Bhima could be his rescue now.

Drona.

Speak out to us, charioteer ! Who captured him and how ?
Was his chariot overturned? Were horses out of hand ?
Did his quiver fail him? Did roughness of the land
Cause him to falter, or did you yourself neglect to bring
Support to him, or was his bow loosened at the string?
These accidents occur by fate to those who fight in cars;
Or did the foemen drag him off, helped by malignant stars.
They hardly mastered one by bows so skilfull in that art.

Char.

No, he is perfect master of that skill in every part.
Does not your reverence know him? None of these ills occurred;
That they could not assail him might easily be inferred.
About my chariot hotly there poured a ceasless stream
Of arrows; all my car was like a whirling wheel agleam.
A mere foot-soldier captured him.

All.

A foot-soldier, you say ?

Drona.

What sort of a foot-soldier and what was his array?

Char.

Shall I describe his aspect or his enormous strength?

Bhi.

Women are known for beauty but men are known for strength.
So tell us of his prowess.

Char.

Then just as you decide.

Dur.

What use is it to praise him in phrases stuffed with pride?
I have neither fear nor envy, though his speed be like the gale.

Char.

Hear patiently, your Majesty; my language shall not fail.
Swifter than horses, with bare hands he grasped the car, and still
And motionless those horses stood, answering—his will.

Bhi.

Then lay aside our arms.

All.

Why so? We cannot understand.

Bhi.

Because such deeds are only done by Bhimasena's hand.
For once before on foot he seized the swift Jayadratha
Who then was carrying off by rape the daughter of Drupada.

Drona.

Bhishma is right. I taught him. The child was past compare.
He shot a shaft and ran so fast he caught it in the air!

Sak.

What nonsense are you talking! Let me ask you this.
Is there no other strong man? Drona, you judge amiss.
You praise only your pupils as men of solid worth.
Do you think Pandavas are lords of all the earth?

Bhi.

Peace, king of the Gandharas! You boast what no man knows.
We ride into the battle equipped with swords and bows.

Only two men have ever gone naked into strife—
Rama and Bhimasena—and issued with their life.

Sak.

All of us, robbed of daring, were laid upon the shelf,
Some declare that Uttara was Arjuna himself.

Drona.

O king of the Gandharas, how can you judge so wrong?
Could Uttara in battle release a constant throng
Of arrows keen as thunderbolts and numerous as rain,
Causing the sun to vanish, leaving darkness on the plain?

Bhi.

Gandhari's son, it's clear enough. For surely you know well
The name which the inscriptions on all the arrows spell!
Arjuna sends a message to make all discord cease.

(*Enter a Charioteer.*)

Char.

Honored sir, my greeting! It were well to make a peace.

Bhi.

But why?

Char.

It had been better to make this peace before,
For upon all those arrows flying in the war
Only one name was written.

Bhi.

Truly, bring it to me here.

(*Charioteer hands over the arrow.*)

Bhi.

(*takes the arrow and reads*). Sakuni, child, read me the word;
my old eyes grow unclear.

Sak.

(*takes the arrow and reads*). Arjuna! (*throws it down; it falls at Drona's feet.*)

Drona

(*picking up the arrow*). O come, come, my son, this shaft
beyond dispute
My pupil shot to Bhishma to give him a salute.
Guided in kindness to me, as by some magic spell,
It now has fallen at my feet, honoring me as well.

Sak.

Do not say so ! Shall we have faith in any feathered shaft?
Anyone named Arjuna may frighten us by craft.
Besides, Uttara's writing also should here be shown.

Dur.

If rumor has reported that I resign my throne,
I shall not now give half away as any easy prize
Until king Yudhishthira stands alive before my eyes.

(*Enter Uttara.*)

Utt.

The road was short. I let my horses run at fullest speed
And yet my chariot was delayed, even in my utmost need;
So many elephants lay killed my horses hardly moved,
The ground was so uneven, battered, rent and grooved.

(*Comes forward with folded hands.*)

Preceptor, noble grandsire, and all assembled kings,
I greet you !

All.

And we wish you all that good fortune brings !

Drona.

What is the word you bring us from the great king Virata?

Utt.

I do not come from him.

Drona.

From whom?

Utt.

From king Yudhishthira.

Drona.

What does your righteous master say?

Utt.

Placable and mild
His words. He says Abhimanyu will be married to his child;
That he invites the Kuru kings cordially to grace
Their marriage at his palace or even in this place.

Sak.

Not here, not here, but there !—

Drona.

Ah yes, mere business brought us here.
Now the five days are ended; new solemnities appear.
We shall add our present to king Virata's store.

Dur.

I grant to the Pandavas the realm they had before.
If faith is lost, the man is lost; where faith lives, truth is won.
Joy to our lion-hearted king ! Two houses now are one.

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

II

POTSHERD AS ENVOY

(Enter the Stage Manager.)

S. M.

'May Narayana bless you, lord of this cyclorama,
Author, prologue, epilogue of this world's ceaseless drama !'
With these words, lords and gentlemen, I must tell you this—
What was that sound, just as I spoke?—I'll find now what it is.

(Voice behind the scenes)

Voice.

Ho there, carry the message !

S. M.

Good; I understand.
Krishna and Arjuna were lured off by a band
Of Kuru soldiers, while at once the leading Kuru crew,
Enraged at Bhishma's slaying, killed young Abhimanyu.
The kings, in dread of Arjuna's return, at once retired
To their encampment, fleeing from alarm his shafts inspired.

(Exit.)

(Enter a Soldier.)

Sold.

Ho there, carry the message ! Tell the majestic king,
Dhritarashtra of the hundred sons, the message that we bring!
Abhimanyu, though a boy playing on the battlefield,
Displayed his father's prowess, forcing steeds and men to yield;
Elephants fled before him; then his foes from every side
Suddenly encircled him and so at length he died.
Now he has joined his lordly grandfather in the spheres.

(Enter Dhritarashtra, Gandhari, Duhsala and Portress.)

Dhr.

O what is this I hear? What troubled word offends my ears?
Who brings this hateful message thinking it would pleasure me,
Foretelling ruin to our house, brought low to misery?
The crime of killing such a child will not be washed away.

Gand.

There it is again, my lord, shining clear as day:
This fratricidal war will end with all our children dead.

Dhr.

It will all be clear, Gandhari.

Gand.

When?

Dhr.

Before this day has sped.
Arjuna will be at his work, furious for Abhimanyu.
I see him with his frightful bow, Lord Krishna coming, too.
There will be peace upon the earth only when life is gone.

Gand.

Ah, my grandson, why have you suffered this frightful wrong?

Duh.

The man who fastened widowhood upon our young son's wife
Has likewise fastened widowhood on his own spouse for life.

Dhr.

Who has opened up the path to this consuming flame?

Jay.

Sire, it was I.

Dhr.

Who are you?

Jay.

Jayadratha is my name.

Dhr.

You are Jayadhratha. Who killed Abhimanyu
Holds his life cheap, so daring the fierce Pandava crew!

Sold.

Sire, many kings rushed on him with roaring force and speed.
It may be that Jayadratha performed the final deed.

Dhr.

What? Jayadratha did it?

Sold.

Yes, we tell you this again.

Dhr.

Can it be true? Then Jayadratha is as good as slain.

(*Hearing this Duhsala begins to moan.*)

Who is that moaning?

Port.

Sire, it is the princess, Duhsala.

Dhr.

Do not cry, my daughter; your husband Jayadratha
Unsatisfied with wedded life, exposed his naked breast
To fierce Arjuna's arrows.

Duh.

Then it seems to me the best
That I go to my son's daughter.

Dhr.

But what do you intend?

Duh.

That with her I wear widow's mourning till my life shall end.

Gand.

Dear daughter, do not speak dark words of evil augury!
Your husband still is living.

Duh.

How can such things be?
This is forever fated as the stars shine in the sky:
Whoever angers Krishna or Arjuna must die.

Dhr.

You speak the truth. And furthermore misery and mishap
Must surely come to one who kills the child who in the lap
Of Krishna once was seated and pillowed on his arm.
Who strikes the great Pandavas' family comes to mortal harm.
Krishna, intoxicated with devotion to the child,
Dooms such a man to evil, never reconciled.—
Jayadratha, when Arjuna saw his son in such despair,
What did he do?

Sold.

What, sire, you think that Arjuna was there?

Dhr.

Why, was he not?

Sold.

No, not at all.

Dhr.

How did it happen, then?

Sold.

Listen and I shall tell you. While the conspiring men
With their strategy lured Krishna and Arjuna away,
Abhimanyu joined battle, blithely as a child at play.

Dhr.

Then surely he was killed. Who braves a tiger in his cave?
But what are the Pandavas doing with one so brave?

Sold.

Listen ! They have not placed the youthful body on the pyre
Lest Arjuna might see it and be roused to fearful ire.
They mutter names of all the kings who covered it with blows.

Dhr.

Come, Gandhari, go to where the sacred Ganges flows.

Gad.

Why, my lord? to bathe in it?

Dhr.

What folly to suppose
Such things ! No, but I plan to make oblation for my sons
Killed by their own offenses. Where the sacred river runs
I'll fetch my gifts of water and hold the princes still
And peaceable as far as they will answer to my will.

(*Enter Duryodhana, Duhsasana and Sakuni.*)

Dur.

My dearest Duhsasana, with Abhimanyu's death
Enmity is established, with war to the last breath.
Our foes are finally driven off. Lord Krishna's arrogance
Is now destroyed and fame to us turns her fair countenance.

Duh.

Yes, Pandu's sons were thwarted. Jayadratha's blow
Vanquished the enemy and laid Arjuna's offspring low,
Pierced by a hundred arrows. We stood in sorry straights
Through Bhishma's fall in battle but now we stand elate
In victory having turned war's veering tide again and won
Endless fame and glory in the slaughter of their son.

Sak.

When fighting, Jayadratha was everywhere the chief
In bravery, the princes found his courage passing belief.
His prowess in the battle soared high, a roaring flame
Of wrath, and thus deprived them of their offspring and their fame.

Dur.

Uncle !

Sak.

Yes, my boy?

Dur.

Come, uncle, here to me.
And you, dear Duhsasana, salute his Majesty.
My father.

Sak.

No, I will not. He hates conflict in the clan.
He is fond of the Pandavas and will blame us, if he can.
Is it becoming to us, victorious in the fight,
To approach him with our faces jubilant and bright?

Dur.

Father, I salute you, I am Duryodhana.

Duh.

I salute you, father, I am Duhsasana.

Sak.

This is Sakuni speaking; I salute you thus.

All Three

What, not a word of blessing to be given unto us?

Dhr.

How can there be a blessing when you together killed
A child, Abhimanyu, whose youthful beauty filled
Krishna's and Arjuna's hearts with love past mortal scope?
How may one pronounce a blessing on lives of those past hope?

Dur.

Father, why are you so troubled?

Dhr.

What is my sorrow's source?
Ah, the stupidity of men! You cannot guess its cause?
In this house I had a hundred sons, only a single daughter,
Dearer to me than all my sons; now you have lured to slaughter
Her husband, leaving her henceforth in wretched widowhood.

Dur.

Did not Jayadratha do bravely as he should?

Dhr.

That gallant warrior held in check the whole Pandava clan.

Dur.

Ah! held them back, did he? But so did many another man.

Dhr.

Ah ! when so many champions ruthlessly surprised
My son, my grandson, why were not their strong arms paralyzed?

Dur.

Why were those arms not paralyzed that in an ambush slew
Old Bhishma? Youth and age are one in war's remorceless view.

Dhr.

Can Bhishma and Abhimanyu in dying be compared?

Dur.

Why not, father?

Dhr.

Hear, my son. The old one was prepared
For death; he was cut down as he determined, well content;
The other was cut off in youth and with him also went
Arjuna's first born son, who likewise was the Kuru heir.

Duh.

Father, that was no child of yours who died in battle there !

Dhr.

Is that Duhsasana speaking?

Duh.

Yes, while all of us looked on
Or labored only languidly, profusely as the sun
Flings forth its rays and with the force of Indra's thunderhead
His arrows flew, leaving the kings wounded or else dead.

Dhr.

Ah, when you see the stacks of slain which this young warrior
piled,
What will Arjuna do, enflamed by slaughter of his child?

Dur.

But, father, after all, who is this Arjuna you praise?

Dhr.

Do you not know Arjuna, the bane of all our days?

Dur.

No, not I.

Dhr.

No more do I. But many warriors know
Arjuna's speed and valor and the terror of his bow.

Dur.

Who are these people, father, who know his strength and pride?

Dhr.

Listen, son, ask Indra, whom Arjuna's strength defied:
Ask Siva, whom no weapons guarded from Arjuna's blows;
Ask Agni, whom the serpents aid, but nonetheless who knows
Arjuna's force; ask that divine magician who today
Felt his arrows, Citrungada, left vanquished in the fray.

Dur.

If this is all Arjuna claims, mighty in strength and limb,
Is there no warrior of our clan that is a match for him?

Dhr.

Why, if so, who?

Dur.

Why, Karna.

Dhr.

Karna is ridiculous.

Poor Karna !

Dur.

Why so?

Dhr.

Listen ! Though his fame be fabulous,
He is careless and soft-hearted; he shares his chariot
With Salya, his congenial friend, though divine Indra got
His armor from him by deceit and also has decreed
That his keenest weapon shall fail in his most need.
Karna will be equal to Arjuna only when
Rudra, Indra, Agni lend him strength, and only then.

Sak.

You have the right to scoff at us.

Dhr. Is that Sakuni speaking?
Your gambling is the cause of this destruction all are seeking.
You are the raging fire that lights upon our house and home.

Dur.

Ha ! from what mysterious sources now abruptly come
This trembling and this roaring that shake the earth and sky?
The heavens seem ablaze with meteors falling from on high.

Dhr.

I am thinking, son, and marvelling. Its origin is plain;
These are the Sky God's teardrops falling for his grandson slain.

Dur.

Jayadratha, find why the Pandava army hums
With roar and din of warcries, conches and kettle-drums?

Sold.

As your Majesty commands (*Exit and re-enters.*)
When Arjuna, returned
From encounter with us where the battle-fever burned,
He placed his dead son on his lap, bathing him in his tears,
Then, egged on by Krishna's taunts, he vowed to his compeers—

Dur.

What was his vow?

Sold.

But even sooner than Arjuna spoke
His oath, from the whole army, elate with pride, their broke
A sudden roar of 'Victory!' Their faces beamed with joy
And fervor to attack and maim and utterly destroy.
Even the earth seemed trembling, as a girl confused in love.

Dhr.

If the earth shook before he spoke, what are we dreaming of ?
It's clear that when he grasps his bow the triple world will shake.

Dur.

What was his oath?

Sold.

'Upon the man who slew my son I'll take
Such vengeance that this man shall die before the day is done.'

Dur.

I shall attempt to thwart his oath.

Dhr.

What will you do, my son?

Dur.

I shall cover Jayadratha with the masses of my men
So that no hostile soldier can reach his side again.
If they so love Abhimanyu and impose on us the blame,
Then let them, with their elephants, enter the funeral flame!

Dhr.

Though Jayadratha burrow to the center of this world
Or climb the spacious heavens where the farthest stars are whirled,

The darts of Krishna's comrade will surely find him out.

Sold.

Had any other crossed our king, his death were without doubt.

(*Enter Potsherd, a manifestation of Krishna.*)

Pot.

I come to see the ignoble killers of Abhaminyu.
To the discus-wielder, Krishna, my loyalty is due,
As when a lordly elephant follows his goad for food.
Here is the foe's encampment and here the treacherous brood
Of enemies hold leaguer. I will dismount and bring
My message to their hearing from the Pandava king.
I am Ghatotkaca, demon Hidimba's son;
I shall see the aged prince here utterly undone
Through the rash faults committed by his audacious kin.—
Give me leave, O Kurus, that I may enter in!

Dur.

Come, come into your enemies' encampment. I am curious
To hear Lord Krishna's daring words uttered strangely thus.
I am Duryodhana and I am waiting here.

Pot.

But I see king Dhritarashtra, whom I better should revere.
He has a noble countenance, gentle, grave and bold.
He indeed is wonderful ! Though he be gray and old,
His face is still unwrinkled, his shoulders, broad, compact;
His fortitude sustains his form, as knowing he is backed
By the strong arms of five-score sons.—The gods, being of a mind
That he might soon surpass them, had this man born blind.—
Grandfather, I salute you. No, it instead is best
That the great kings salute you, I after all the rest.
I am Ghatotkaca.

Dhr.

Son, you have a courteous tongue.
But yet your tale is sad for me because my heart is wrung
With sorrow at your brother's death. How pitiful for me
That misdemeanors of my sons produce this misery !

Pot.

Your Majesty is noble. The Blessed One has sent
Me to you, my grandfather, offering his compliment—

Dhr. (*rising from his seat*).

What are the commands, my son, the Blessed One has given?

Pot.

No, take your seat, for Krishna, soul of Vishnu, Lord of Heaven—

Dhr.

Just as the Lord of Heaven commands.

Pot.

—Grandfather, listen now !
This is what the Blessed One exclaims and makes his vow.
'Dear child Abhimanyu, light of the Kuru clan,
Also of the Pandavas, most miserable young man,

You have left Krishna's family and, going on before,
Ascend to heaven to visit your royal ancestor.'
'If now Arjuna's grief is such at loss of only one
Offspring, what will yours be to lose your hundredth son?
Therefore, great sir, arise, lest you should pay the final price
And grieving for your own sons die as a burnt sacrifice.'
So the hero spoke.—

Dhr.

Ah, Blessed One, whose fatal rage
Abets Arjuna's purpose! I seem to see an age
When all men save Arjuna will fall, their glory sped,
And all our noble princes be lying, cold and dead.

Dur.

What preposterous words are these?

Dhr.

Do you find them so?

Dur.

Preposterous, indeed, to prophesy our overthrow!
Krishna must be plotting with gods to think that he
Alone can overpower our kings with such legerity.

Pot.

You flout me. I am only the envoy Krishna sent.
It's proper you should also know of Arjuna's intent.

Duh.

Not so, you make a mockery of all the warrior caste.
But you shall hear from others before the hour is passed
Those orders from the royal lord whom all the earth obeys.

Pot.

What are they? Does not Krishna deserve your reverend praise?

Krishna of old set free the kings prisoners in Mayadha
And won the prize from Bhishma, as all the warriors saw.
Krishna has bound Fortune a mistress at his side.
Is this the wondrous king of kings you threaten and deride?

Dur.

Duhsasana, no more chatter ! Be he king, strong, weak or dead,
What is the need of many words? What has your master said?

Pot.

Well, yes.—August Narayana, who is lord indeed,
And master of the universe, dispatched me here with speed.
You must know destruction of all your clan is fated
And earth itself shall stagger with the corpses overweighted !
Nothing can stop Arjuna in the forefront of the fray
Who for his son's loss dooms your death by thunderbolts today.

Sak.

If words could do this thing alone, the world were promptly won.
If only words killed warriors, the deed were quickly done.

Pot.

Bah ! Here's Sakuni bragging. Give up your wicked dice
And let the battlefield become the suitable device
And target for the arrows that soon shall lay you low.
There is no woman here to steal nor king to overthrow,
For in the game of arrows the gambler plays for life.

Duh.

If you say bah ! to us, take care, you taunt us into strife
Where death's the limit. You are mad and reckless of your word.
Take care, because your silencing may not be long deferred !
Though you are proud and ugly even from your mother's womb,
B ware, for we are demons to plague you in the tomb !

Po

Heaven forbid ! You are much worse than demons in your sin.
At dead of night the demons do not burn their sleeping kin.
Demons do not celebrate the slaughter of a child;
Though strange in form, the demons may be merciful and mild.

Dur.

You come to us an envoy, not to fight but to confer.
Take home your message. We're not those who kill a messenger.

Pot.

What, will you throw it in my teeth that I'm an envoy here ?
Well, then, I am not an envoy and still I have no fear.
Fall on me all together ! A truce to all your craft !
I'm not child Abhimanyu, slaughtered by a shaft.
My desire has been since boyhood to defy a craven crowd
Of adversaries weak in arm though arrogant and loud.—
Here stands Ghatotkaca, biting lips and raising fists
In fury, to defy you in Death's appointed lists.

Dhr.

My dearest grandson, pardon, hear my moderating word.

Pot.

I cannot withold my anger, hearing what I now have heard.—
What am I to answer to august Narayana?

Dur.

Announce from whom? Then say from me, haughty
Duryodhana,
That many words are useless, speech leaves warriors in doubt
No word flies far when men must fight and I am issuing out.
To battle where a hundred kings have planned your overthrow.
Wait there with your Pandavas ! I shall answer with my bow.

Pot.

Grandfather, I am going.

Dhu.

Go, my grandson, go.

Pot.

But hear, you kings, Arjuna's final word from me.
Do what is right, having regard for your own family,
Lest, disguised as the Pandavas, teaching what should be done,
The shafts of death assault you with the rising of the sun !

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

III

THE EMBASSY

(Enter the Stage Manager.)

S. M.

'May Vishnu's foot defend you, that brings joy to all the world,
By whose red-nailed claws the demon through the flaming sky was hurled.'
With these words, my lords and gentlemen, I must tell you this.—
What was that sound, just as I spoke?—I'll find now what it is.

(Voice behind the scenes)

Voice.

Ho there, gateman, hear king Duryodhana's strict command.

S. M.

Good, we hasten to obey him and we wholly understand.
While war looms between Pandavas and Dhritarashtra's Kuru state
At Duryodhana's word we clear this chamber for debate.

(Enter a Chamberlain.)

Cham.

Gateman, hear what Duryodhana, our great sovereign, bids us say:
Summon all the kings to council.—But look, here he comes this way,
Youthful, dark-skinned, robed in white, beneath a canopy held high,
His annointed limbs bejewelled, like a full moon in the sky!

(Enter Duryodhana.)

Dur.

My spirits, pent within me, have been turbulent before
But are now at peace since henceforth we rejoice in glorious war.
In this festival of battle my great fury shall be spent
By hacking the proud tusks of some Pandava elephant.

Cham.

Victory ! before you the whole host of princes stands.

Dur.

Well done, servant. You may leave us.

Cham.

As your Majesty commands. (*Exit.*)

(*The characters about to be mentioned are imagined by the audience.*)

Dur.

Lords Vaikarna, Varshadeva, there are summoned at my call
Our eleven armies. Who is best prepared to lead them all ?
What's your answer ?—'Such a matter is most grave.' 'Then let's decide
After due deliberation.' 'True.' 'I summon you inside.
Priest, my royal salutation ! Princes, take your proper stations !
My respects to you, grandfather ! Hasten our deliberations !
Vaikarana, Varshadeva, my true comrades and my kin,
My good warriors, enter freely! Dear friend Karna, now come in.'

(*The above characters may enter but remain mute.*)

My preceptor, take the tortoise throne, the honored place of prayer !
Grandfather, you the lion throne, pray you, be seated there !
Uncle, there's the seat of hide. Good princes, pray be seated;
Gentlemen, sit as you will, you are all warmly greeted.
What, the great king still standing? Your devotion shows no pride.
Well, well, I'll take my seat, friend Karna sitting at your side.
(*Sits down.*) Lords Vaikarna, Varshadeva, who are summoned at my call,
Who of our eleven armies is best fit to lead them all?
What is this you say? 'His Highness of Gandhara should express
His opinion first.' What say you ? What's that uncle ? You profess
'Aged Bhishma, son of Ganga, is the man whom we require
To be leader.' Well said, uncle, that is also my desire

And our grandsire so determines. Let the hearts of chieftains bow
As the consecrating waters fall on Bhishma's head and brow.
Let the roar of drums and conchshells' blare be heard like
rattling hail
Or the thunder of the ocean lashed to fury by a gale.

(*Enter Chamberlain.*)

Cham.

Hail, my sovereign! Their best champion, Narayana, has recourse
To our council as an envoy from the proud Pandava force.

Dur.

Can that be so, my chamberlain? Is he their best of men,
Thieving Krishna, Kamsa's servant, who drives cattle into pen,
He the landless, the forsaken, what is such an envoy for ?
Worthless chamberlain, to speak of such a mean ambassador !

Cham.

Pardon lord, for my confusion ! I was taken by surprise.
(*Falls at his feet.*)

Dur.

Very well. All men are subject to confusion. You may rise.

Cham.

Thank you, sovereign !

Dur.

I am satisfied. But why is this man here?

Cham.

As an envoy, bearing many names, it seems he would appear
At our council and Kesava is his humblest epithet.

Dur.

'Ah, Kesava, humble cowherd !' Yes, that's proper etiquette.
Ask the princes what reception is to such a rascal due.
'He should be received with honor.' That is not at all my view.
Put this fellow into prison ! He is chief of all their spies;
Krishna safe in jail, Pandavas will have lost their keenest eyes.
And what's more, if any prince should rise to greet this fellow here,
I will fine him twelve gold pieces and so teach him whom to fear.

(*aside*). But how can I myself, I wonder, keep free from doing so?
Let me ponder on this matter carefully—. Yes, at last I know.
(*aloud*). Chamberlain, go fetch the pictured scroll that's
hanging over there
Showing vile Draupadi dragged away seized by her dress and hair.
I shall fix my eyes on that; when Krishna comes I need not stand.

Cham.

As you wish. (*Exit and re-enters.*) Here lies the scroll.

Dur.

Spread it.

Cham.

I do my lord's command.

Dur.

Ah, what a splendid picture! Here Duhsasana seizes
Draupadi roughly by her locks and drags her where he pleases.
That is the queen Draupadi, eyes dilated in her fright,
A digit of the moon eclipsed by demons of the night.
Here evil-minded Bhima, seeing Draupadi hauled
In presence of the princes, feels his noble heart appalled
With amazement. Yudhishthira honest and most upright soul,
Compassionate by nature yet defeated in his goal
Through his gambling, makes an effort to traquilize the wild
Anger there enflaming Bhima and so to sprinkle mild
Patience over them; Arjuna here is desperate with rage,
Pale lips quivering, eyes blurred and, over-eager to engage
Many men in instant battle and so with his strong hands draw
Gandiva's bow at enemies he holds not worth a straw.
These things are pictured to the life; as the deeds were, so they are.
Here is Yudhishthira restraining Arjuna
And here am I rebuking gamblers who misbehave,
Warning that all bad loosers are challenged by the brave.
But here the master-gambler, who cheated in the game,
Laughs in insolent triumph, fanning into flame
The anger of the others, flinging himself around,
Leering at queen Draupadi weeping on the ground.—

Here the venerable priest and aged king arise
And, shamed to see the injured queen, cover offended eyes.
What faces and what colors ! A scroll beyond compare !
A perfect picture ! We are pleased.—Chamberlain, who's there?

Cham.

Victory to the king !

Dur.

Good fellow, bring this Krishna, who has got
Such puffed up pride from driving his wingéd chariot.

Cham.

As you command.

Dur.

Karna, my friend, black-hearted Krishna's come
As envoy to pronounce on us the proud Pandavas' doom.
This hireling comes, but Karna, deaden your manly ears
At Yudhishthira's peaceful words, gentle as womens' tears.

(*Enter Vasudeva* (*Krishna*) *and Chamberlain.*)

Vas.

At Yudhishthira's bidding and further for the sake
Of kind Arjuna's friendship, I hereby undertake
This thankless role of envoy to Duryodhana's court,
As overbearing in the war as in his patience short.
Beware lest the proud forest of the Kuru's family
Be fired by shafts Arjuna shoots at your tall seed-tree!
His anger, long ignited by queen Draupadi's shame,
Threatens with its terrors to set the world aflame.
He also bears a battle-ax strong as a temple post
To crush an elephant's broad brow, the mightiest in their host.—
Here is indeed a royal town, with glittering towers and halls,
Vast armories crammed with weapons, horses neighing in their stalls;
The elephants are trumpeting; horns raise their lusty din,
Yet all this pride is doomed because of flaunting of their kin.—
Chamberlain, am I to enter?

Cham.

Yes, as our lord may please.

Vas. (*going in*).

Why, what is this? On seeing me these men are ill at ease.
Pray, do not alarm yourselves!

Dur.

What's this? You're all disturbed.
At Krishna's sight the warriors are restless and perturbed.
Stop moving now! Remember the fine that shall be due
At any motion! I rule here.

Vas.

Duryodhana, how are you?

Dur. (*falling off his seat*).

It's clear enough to me—this is lord Krishna's power alone,
Boldly as I resolved to keep here seated on my throne.
This is a tricky fellow.—Master envoy, take your chair!

Vas.

Priest, take your seat. All rest at ease. I shall be seated there.
(*sitting down*).
O what a splendid picture!—No, no, this is the scene
Witnessing the torture of the Pandava queen,
Draupadi dragged indignantly by clothing and by hair,
And here is vile Sakuni, the cause of her despair.
He thinks such childish anger a valorous display
But who would dare to flaunt his crime in such a public way?—
Put aside this picture!

Dur.

Yes, take this picture off.

Cham.

As your Majesty commands. (*Takes it away.*)

Dur. (*aside*).

Now I'll no longer scoff.—
Say, master envoy, are they well, in health and happiness,
The wine-begotten Bhima, son of all righteousness,
Arjuna, heaven's child, and all the lords of land and wealth?

Vas.

This is worthy of Gandhari's son. Yes, they are all in health.
Moreover, the Pandavas, whom Yudhishthira guides,
Wish your princes' welfare and all your realm besides.
We have endured great hardships but now our treaty grants
That we shall share by covenant our just inheritance.

Dur.

What's that ? My uncle hunting once committed an ill deed
And so incurred the sage's curse that he should have no seed.
He felt no longer for his wives; his days of lust were done.
How could his patrimony issue to another's son?

Vas.

But here lurks a dark question. Vicitravirya's life was spent
In license bringing sickness, leaving him impotent.
How then did your father Dhritarashtra, Vyasa's heir,
Himself succeed with honor to the imperial chair?
No, do not in your insolence advance this futile claim,
Or open strife will soon destroy the Kurus race and fame.
So, a peace-loving nation, quenching wrath and conscious of
Our common interest, you will grant the Pandavas your love.

Dur.

Master envoy, you know nothing of these subtle state affairs.
Kinship is for the victor, not for the legal heirs.
Victory is not for beggars nor for the weak or poor
But to the brave in battle she opens wide her door.
If you would gain a triumph, courageously engage
In battle. This will gain a throne, not a quiet hermitage.

Vas.

King Duryodhana, do not so rebuke your family
Nor cheat them; pride is royal, though not with infamy.

Dur.

Master envoy, you lacked pity for king Kamsa, your own kin.
Therefore why should this resistance of our enemies be sin ?

Vas.

Do no tchallenge me for that, for Kamsa caused unnatural pain
To my mother and conspired to have my father jailed and slain.

Dur.

No, no, you cheated Kamsa and you praise yourself too much
For that action and your cowardice with Magadhi's lord was such
That when he blazed with anger you promptly fled in fear
From his vengeance. Tell me truly, where did bravery appear ?

Vas.

Sir, true bravery and policy regard both time and place.
To continue idle jesting at a serious hour is base.
Show affection for your cousins; it is petty to be vexed
At their faults. True family loyalty serves this world and the next.

Dur.

How can there be affection between the sons of gods and men?
This is grinding what is ground. Come to your senses once again !

Vas. (*aside*).

When I offer peace and friendship, he is still more flushed with pride,
So I'll challenge him with language that perhaps may turn the tide.
(*aloud*). Duryodhana, do you know Arjuna's valor and his strength?

Dur.

No, not I.

Vas.

But I easily might expatiate at length.
In fighting with the Lord of Beasts he made his valor plain.
When fire consumed Khandava's wood his arrows fell as rain.
Confronting fiends in mail, he made that battle his delight;
He alone put Bhishma and his chief allies to flight.
Furthermore I may recall to you a lesser episode,
When you yourself were visiting the herdsman's poor abode,

The Bird-King, Chitrasena, raised you screaming up on high
Till only by Arjuna you were rescued from the sky.—
Briefly, son of Dhritarashtra, give Pandava chiefs their due
Or those chiefs will seize your total realm, obliterating you.

Dur.

What, Pandava chiefs will seize it? Though the Wind-God took the form
Of your champion, Bhimesana, we should laugh his strength to scorn.
And though Indra's self were manifest in great Arjuna's shape,
We should not yield one blade of grass nor let your host escape.
My father held our kingdom far from your grasping reach
And you shall not acquire it now by loudness of your speech.

Vas.

What disgrace upon the Kuru clan has hereby come to pass!
Lover of shame, pray tell me, are we speaking here of grass?

Dur.

Why, cowherd, grass has hitherto stuffed your proud belly full.
You who have killed a virgin, a horse, and even a bull,
And wrestlers at a festival, how can you, shameless one,
Converse with honest warriors or boast what you have done?

Vas.

Why, do you mock me?

Dur.

No indeed, for all I speak is true.

Vas.

I shall leave at once.

Dur.

And we shall be well rid of you.
Go to your stall, your feeble limbs white with the dust of cattle,
Leaving to honest princes matters of state and battle.

Vas.

So be it. But we shall not go until your clan has heard
The message that I carry, great Yudhishthira's word.

Dur.

Bah ! you are not worthy to be spoken to.
Why should princes listen to such a boor as you?
Over me the white and royal canopy is borne.
My brow has been annointed from the hour that I was born.
I do not speak with men like you, slaves of our vassal kings.

Vas.

You do not speak with men like me?—Hear what your future brings:
You raven croaking evil, curse of the Kuru crew,
Your house shall meet destruction chiefly because of you.
Princes, give me leave to go !

Dur.

What does this fool allege?
He has abused before us an envoy's privilege.
Bind him Dushtesvara, Durmukha, Duhsasana,
Durbuddhi, all you warriors ! Seize him, Duhsasana!
This Krishna murdered Kamsa, slew elephant and horse;
Bred in a pen with cowherds, his mouth becomes a source
Of blasphemy to princes. He desecrates our ground.
Let him be silenced quickly, arrested, gagged and bound !
The fellow is a weakling. Uncle, bind this man !
What, my uncle falters?—I shall bind him if I can.

Vas.

What, Duryodhana fancies that he can fetter me?
Well, I will test his mighty strength and foil him readily.

(*Assumes his universal form.*)

Dur.

No, master envoy, I shall quickly see that you are bound,
Though your own or others' magic circle you around,
Though with celestial weapons your quiver should be full
And you be proud with felling elephant, horse and bull.—
Stay still ! I cannot see you !—Now he is there, now here.—
How small he looks ! How tall he looks ! Why do you disappear?

Now there are different Krishnas all about the hall.—
Princes, each bind one and so in time we shall have all.—
Now they all are coming freely to our hands.—
Soon they will be meekly obeying our commands.
Pandavas will be sighing and weeping as a flood
When they see you pierced with arrows, your proud limbs besmeared with blood. (*Exit.*)

Vas.

Do not speak of the Pandavas, for their business must be mine.
Come here, the Discus Thrower, Sudarsana the divine,
My universal image when I am wholly blest,
Wherein my true and transcendental being is expressed.—

(*Enter Sudarsana.*)

Sud.

Here are the heavenly weapons of the Celestial One,
The sword that's named Nandaka, mocking the burning sun,
The battle-ax Kaumodaki, destroying the gods' foe,
Smashing his blackened bosom; and here comes the long bow,
Sarnga, whose strings twang thunder, bringing terror to the world,
With the conch-shell, Pancajanya, from which deepest tones are hurled.
Ho, the spirits have assembled but we do not need your strength.
My enemies are staggered and my anger calmed at length.—
Ah, they have gone.—Now I must go.—But mountain-side and rock
Are quaking in the terror and shattered in the shock
Of violent wind and earthquake. Huge serpents hide in fear.
What does this portend? I see; Garuda coming here.
He is the hippogryph divine, my master's magic steed,
Who, snatching nectar from the fiend, best served his mother's need.
This boon was given Krishna to be his flying throne.
O Garuda, Kasyapa's son, the hero's wrath is gone.
Return now to your own abode! I must be going, too,—
But what is this commotion in the air that comes to view?
Here the gods are crowding, filling the radiant sky,

Crowns falling from their heads divine, so furiously they fly.
Vishnu's wrath deprived them of their beauty and their power,
But now they are returning in this peaceful, blessed hour.
I, too, must follow after, having my divine recourse
To Mount Meru. (*Exit.*)

Vas.

And I, too, now join with the Pandava force.

(*Voice behind the scene*)

Voice.

No, no, he must not go !

Vas.

That sound must be the old king's voice,
Peaceful, calm and solemn, making my heart rejoice.
I am still here, blind king. (*Enter Dhritarashtra.*)

Dhr.

Where is blest Narayana now,
The brahman's friend, his mother's joy, to whom Pandavas bow ?
By reason of my son's offense, O Wielder of the Bow,
I lay my head beneath your feet, praying you not to go.

Vas.

Ah me, your Majesty falls down. Arise and let us meet !

Dhr.

I thank you, Blessed One. Now take this water for your feet,
For you are welcome !

Vas.

I accept all gifts. What can I do
As a further service, father, to be given unto you?

Dhr.

If the Blessed One himself is pleased, that answers all desires.

Vas.

Farewell until we meet again !

Dhr.

Just as the good requires ! (*Exit Vasudeva.*)
May our lion-king rule the earth in peaceful sovereignty
That stretches from the mountains to the majestic sea,
And may these Himalayan peaks and those Vindhya hills
Be ear-drops gleaming in the awe this sovereignty instills !

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

IV

KARNA'S TASK

(Enter the Stage Manager.)

S. M.

'May Vishnu, God of Heaven, now give you every joy,
Whose blows the enemies of Heaven utterly destroy!
For those who see this god-like man, whether in earth or hell,
Are terror-stricken, men and women, fiends and gods as well,
Nor any hostile multitude against his strength prevails.
He burst the demon-king's own heart with ax-edge of his nails.'
Withsuch a prayer as this, my lords, I must give you the word—
What sound was that, just as I spoke? What was that noise I heard?

Voice.

Ho there! tell the king of Angas—

S. M.

Yes, one understands.
An urgent messenger brings Karna word with folded hands.
Duryodhana finds the fight all in a fierce uproar.

(Enter a Soldier.)

Sold.

Ho there! tell the king of Angas that this is time for war!
Princes brave as lions advance on elephants and steeds,
And with the Pandu battle-flag rush on to valiant deeds.
Perceiving what is now at stake, the serpent-bannered herd,
Led by the champions of the world, by fierce cries undeterred,
Come forth. The Angas king-in-arms rides from king Salya's home.
But oh, why is the valorous chief in such dejection come?
Accounted first in battle-line, portentous to his foes,
He comes as one of thoughtful mind in spirit bent by woes.

Karna is the majestic sun whose once resplendent brow
Is hidden by the summer's cloud.—But I must leave you now.

(*Exit.*)

(*Enter Karna and Salya.*)

Karna.

No, no, have any hostile kings come in my arrows' range
And yet remained for long alive? Why should my fortune change?
It would please the Kurus if I fought Arjuna instantly.—
King of the Madras, drive my car where Arjuna may be!

Salya.

I shall.

Karna.

My valor matches death, yet there arrives an hour
When all the pomp and pride of war, before which cowards cower,
No longer moves my darkened breast; not elephants nor horse,
Warriors charging on the foe with all their thunderous force,
Blade clashing blade, limb slashed from limb, ruins of empory,
Cannot relieve my blackened heart from pangs of misery.
I am not son of Radha, Queen Kunti was my mother,
But now I find too late that Yudhishthira is my brother
Along with the Pandavas.—This is now my day of days
When in one glorious peak of war I should win highest praise,
But all the skill in arms I learned is at this hour deferred,
My soldier's pride blasted at last, gone at my mother's word.—
O Madra king, hear. How I learned the bitter art of war.

Salya.

Yes, I long to hear.

Karna.

I went to Jamadagni's door.

Salya.

Yes.

Karna.

I went to see that sage, pride of the Bhrigu race,
The terror of the warrior class, with stern and fearful face,

With dark, rough hair, his battle-ax whirling far and wide.
Humbly I saluted him, in silence by his side.

Salya.

And then?

Karna.

He blessed me then, asking my name and why I came.

Salya.

What next?

Karna.

I said, my lord, I come to learn of war's grim game
And how to wield each weapon best.

Salya.

And so, then, what said he?

Karna.

The sage was silent for a while and then reluctantly
Said he would teach only priests but never warriors.

Salya.

Yes, he has a standing feud with leaders who make wars.
And then ?

Karna.

I said I was not of the class inciting strife
And so he taught my weapons' use for military life.

Salya.

And then?

Karna.

A few days after that we strolled, in leisure hours,
Through pleasant woods in search of roots, fuel, grass and flowers.
The aged man, being quickly tired, fell to his noonday nap,
Lying in peace beside me, his head upon my lap.

Salya.

Then?

Karna.

A voracious insect bored its teeth through both my thighs
But I would not awake the sage by writhing nor by cries.
So for my master's sake I suffered long in fortitude.
Then, suddenly, the sage awoke in streams of blood imbrued
And in a blaze of anger cried: 'In time of greatest need
May your best weapons fail you !'

Salya.

That was a curse indeed !
A bitter thing it was for such a mighty sage to say.

Karna.

And now let us inspect the weapons that I bear today.—
These weapons all seem to lack power. And beyond this I see
Our horses stumbling wildly, as though blind by misery.
Our elephants like wind-blown leaves, trembling in affright,
Herald our disastrous end in the forthcoming fight.
The battle-horns and drums are still.

Salya.

That is a dreadful thing !
These are fearful portents !

Karna.

Yet be not dismayed, good king !
The victor gains the glory, the vanquished, heaven's grace.
All's for the best, good friend. The world thinks well in either case.
These steeds, swift as the bird of death, of proud Kamboja stock,
Although they have no prospect of returning from the shock
Of dreadful war, shall yet protect me from the evil power—
Though I be past protection—in this predestined hour.
May happiness possess the hearts of priests, good wives and cattle !
Good luck to fighting men who scorn to turn their backs in battle !
And good luck to my soul, though worldly luck has run its course !

Oh, I am glad ! for I shall pierce the proud Pandava force,
Capture Yudhishthira, famed for his wealth and craft,
And overthrow Arjuna with my resistless shaft,
Until our world shall be a wood wherein all lions are slain.—
Now come, king Salya, let us mount my chariot again !

Salya.

Ah well ! since you so wish it, I shall mount instantly.

Karna.

King of the Madras, drive my car where Arjuna may be !

Voice.

O Karna, I salute you !

Karna.

Ah, what a noble sound !
But I cannot discern the man, look as I will around.
This must be at once a priest and some great nobleman.
My slender steeds who previously at a fierce gallop ran
Now in delicious terror halt and at this grave, deep voice,
As figures in a picture, stand while all their hearts rejoice.
Their ears are taut; their shoulders arched; those necks with jewels strung,
Rub their soft chests, their warlike breasts by that sweet voice unstrung.
You call the sage.—No, I shall call.—O reverend sir, come on
Where we may see you !

Voice.

Back, dark clouds, dissolve before the sun !

(*Enter Indra, disguised as a brahman.*)

Indra.

O Karna, I intreat you !

Karna.

I am glad, my holy friend,
I shall this day be listed among those who gain their end.
Karna salutes you; on his feet he wears the radiant gems
That onetime flashed on kingly heads in royal diadems,
But prouder that his head, by your sage presence purified,
Lies in the dust beneath your feet, here freshly sanctified.

Indra. (*aside*).
What can I say? If I should say 'long life' to him he would
Live on interminably. But if perchance I should
Say nothing, he would certainly despise me as a fool.
On either side I must avoid extremes. No easy rule
Applies. But yes, I have it !—Karna, I salute your name !
Eternal as the sun, sea, moon or mountains be your fame !

Karna.
You might with an auspicious word, have bid me live too long
But you pronounced a better word and others had been wrong.
Virtue is in the effort. Fortune like a serpent's tongue
Flickers even in the lives of kings. That king is truly sung
Whose thoughts are on his people's good, though bodies should
be killed.
But, holy man, what wish of yours by me may be fulfilled ?

Indra.
O Karna, I intreat you ! I require a noble loan.

Karna.
I would give you a noble gift. Now hear what wealth I own.
If it should please you, worthy priest, I'd give a hundred cows,
Young cattle, fit for altars, gold-tipped horns upon their brows,
Who after feeding all their calves yield nectar soft as silk.

Indra.
Your thousand cows are not for me. I drink but little milk.

Karna.
Well, hear again.—I'll give Kambojan horses fleet to run
A gallant race in heaven against the horses of the sun,
Bringers of luck to princes, with great valor in their breast,
Swift as the wind, without a fault and in the battle best.

Indra.
Horses I ride but little. They would not be preferred.

Karna.
Then listen, noble sage, once more. I'll give a countless herd
Of elephants, with whited nail and glittering ivory tusk,

About whose heads the bees converge, sipping the fragrant musk,
Elephants that resemble the Himalayan hills,
About whose brows the thunder roars and sharp-pronged lightning
thrills.

Indra.

Elephants I ride little. No, Karna, you may hold
All of these creatures.

Karna.

What ! Then I will give you endless gold !

Indra.

Yes, I'll take that and go.—No, Karna, no, that will not do !

Karna.

Then I will conquer all the earth and offer it to you.

Indra.

What would I do with all the earth?

Karna.

Then I'll bring every spice,
Fruit, bud and flower that on the earth fits a burnt sacrifice.

Indra.

What good were sacrificial fires and offerings to me?

Karna.

Then take my head.

Indra.

Ugh ! ugh !

Karna.

Don't be alarmed, for if that fee
Falls short, forgive me, holy sage ! I have another plan.
My armor, like my body's strength, is as a single man,
No god nor fiend can pierce it with any sword or spear,
Yet I will give it gladly, with both ear-rings that I wear.

Indra (*joyfully*).

Yes, give me that !

Karna.

So that is what he wishes ! As I see it,
This may be one of Krishna's tricks. But if it is, so be it !
Fie, it is unbecoming to suspect an ill ! Here, take it !

Salya.

King, your armor is your life and you should not forsake it.

Karna.

King Salya, do not check me, for life itself has shown
Great learning comes in time to nought, tall trees are overthrown,
The fountain from the fountain's source the draughts of autumn sever,
But gifts and fair oblations last forever and forever.
Here, take it !

Indra (*taking the armor*).

Yes, I have it now, and now that by this deed
I have fulfilled what long before the gods in heaven decreed,
Namely, Arjuna's victory, I will in peace ascend
My elephant and ride to watch this duel to its end. (*Exit.*)

Salya.

You have been cheated, king.

Karna.

By whom?

Salya.

By Indra.

Karna.

Not at all.
It's I who cheated Indra, he who caused the demon's fall.
Having contented Indra, I reach my final goal.
Indra himself possesses Arjuna, flesh and soul,
Whose hands are rough with patting the celestial elephant
To whom the twice-born painfully endless oblations grant.

(*Enter a Spirit, disguised as a brahman.*)

Spirit.

Indra is grateful, Karna, for the ear-rings and the arms
And prays you to accept a spear to shield you from all harms
And with it to kill one of the Pandava chiefs.

Karna.

O fie !
To take return for gifts free given befits not such as I.

Spirit.

Then take it at a brahman's wish !

Karna.

That I cannot decline,
For any brahman's wish expressed must instantly be mine;
I have ever thought so. But where now can it be had ?

Spirit.

When you recall it to your mind.

Karna.

Then thank you ! I am glad.
You may return.

Spirit.

So be it ! (*Exit.*)

Karna.

King Salya, mount our car.
We must proceed immediately to where the champions are.

(*They mime getting into the chariot.*)

Salya.

Ah, very well.

Karna.

I hear a sound. Say, what can this portend?
That conch is like the ocean's roar proclaiming the world's end.
Can it be Krishna? No, it is Arjuna, who with his might
To revenge Yudhishthira's fall comes on in our despite.
King of the Madras, drive my car where Arjuna may be !

Salya.

I shall. This noble king himself complies with heaven's decree.

(*Exeunt.*)

Epilogue.

May all good fortune reign on earth, all discord disappear,
And may our king with royal virtues rule forever here !

V

THE BROKEN THIGHS

Prologue

(Enter the Stage Manager)

S. M.

'May the Lord Krishna save you in the flood-tide of your woes
As Arjuna was ferried through the torrent of his foes
Tormented by the shafts of war, between those serried banks,
Drona and time-worn Bhishma; the whirlpool and the ranks
Of hurtling waves the King of Sind and Sakuni supplied,
The alligator, Drona's son, by whom a thousand died,
Kripa the crocodile and Duryodhana the main stream
Over whose tortured waves the fangs of the white waters gleam !'—
With these words, lords and gentlemen, I must announce to you—
But what was that deep voice I heard?—Pardon, but I must view
The cause of this.—

Voice.

Ah, we are here !

S. M.

You, now I understand.

(Enter an Assistant.)

Ass.

Where do these warriors come from, master? Here on either hand
Champions are rushing, vying in each other's pride,
Tumultuous in the foray, slashing on every side,
Thirsting to sacrifice their lives in battle, staggering under
Wounds, by knives and elephant-tusks wildly rent asunder.

S. M.

Do you not understand, my lad? Duryodhana is the sole
Survivor on the Kuru side; from Dhritarashtra's whole
Family of a hundred sons he alone is left,
Of wisdom and of all his host utterly bereft.
And there on Yudhishthira's party now alone remain
Only the proud Pandava chiefs; all the rest are slain.
This field is burdened with the dead, loaded with a herd
Of elephants, horses and men. The air itself is blurred.—
Bhima and king Duryodhana to their utmost breath
Fight, their lords and soldiers lost in the house of death.

Interlude

(*Enter three Soldiers.*)

All Three.

Oh, here we are, O here we are !

First S.

Now we at last have come
To that strange hermitage where pride and glory have their home,
The harvest-ground of battle, the touchstone and the test
Of valor, that declares what men deserve great honors best.
Here warriors assemble winning their final trysts
With fairst nymphs of heaven, who raise them from the lists
Of war, this couch for dying kings, this temple where is given
A burning sacrifice of lives, a royal bridge to heaven.

Second S.

You speak the truth. The rugged ground is groaning with the weight
Of elephants' cadavers and all that gruesome freight,
Each corpse a boulder, by the vultures' beaks and claws is riven;
Kings of the earth, leaving their chariots crushed, have fled to heaven.
Industrious in seeking death, they win a deathless name;
They faced extinction but at last gained an immortal fame.

Third S.

Yes, so it is. The battle rite proceeds. The warriors falling
Are victims in a sacrifice of blood; while the appalling
Roar of the battle constitutes the chanting of the priests;
The trunks of elephants are posts raised for their ghastly feasts,
The offerings, a litter of limbs with wounds and scars,
The flags still flying in the wind, the gods' celestial cars.

First S.

Look on the other hand ! Each king has been the other's prey;
Now blood-stained beaks of vultures bear their ornaments away.

Second S.

An elephant who on his back bore a whole arsenal
Of weapons comes under a shower of arrows to his fall.

Third S.

Here is another sight to ponder. As a mother's arm
Helps from his car her daughter's warrior-husband, freed from harm,
So jealous jackals drag dead warriors' bodies from their cars,
Rending their royal armor, decked with jewels thick as stars
Garlands on a banner-pole now on a vulture's breast
Like necklesses of grinning skulls have come at length to rest.

All.

How frightful is this battlefield turned to a marsh or fen
Soaking in mingled blood of horses, elephants and men,
Piled high with chaos of a world fallen to utter wreck,
Corpses littering the plain, severed trunk and neck;
Pikes, maces, lances, axes, swords, cross-bolts, arrows, spears,
Clubs, javelins, armor, banners, flags to rot here through the years.

First S.

The backs of elephants are bridges over which men cross
High seas of blood, and everywhere proud horses at their loss
Of charioteers rush madly; elephants minus their riders, wander
Wildly about, while bodies twist and writhe, though rent asunder,
Even as they did in mortal life.

Second S.

Looking at the skies,
Mark where vultures, black as night, with golden gleaming eyes
And beaks as sharp as shining spears, their van-like wings out-spread,
Hold in their mouths fresh gobs of flesh, rich morsels of the dead!

Third S.

Everywhere our mother earth, source of our life, displays
Pageants of death, bared to the sun's pitiless, burning rays.

First S.

Even in their present plight, their limbs and bodies rent,
Warriors and kings laid low in death appear magnificent !
Faces of dead kings are like pale lotus plants in flower,
Their eyes are bees, their lips are leaves, their knitted brows a bower
Of filaments; as though their lives had only just begun,
They sleep in valor's armor, unstirred beneath the blazing sun.

Second S.

Kings rule men but death rules kings.

Third S.

What then, does death prevail?
Over the great as on the least?

First S.

It conquers without fail.

Second S.

Do not say so ! Though Arjuna today brought down death's night
On those proud kings with arrows remaining from his fight
With Siva, yet proud Arjuna, twanging his frightful bow
Blackened with battle-smoke, still lives having before brought low
The aspiring demons from the skies and in that fatal press
Of battle freed both men and gods from imminent distress.

All.

Aha ! that roar ! Are mountains crumbling at the volts
Of lightning, or are clouds compressed by massive thunderbolts?

Are rocks convulsed by earthquakes or does the raging sea
In caves of the Mandara cliffs roar incessantly?
Well, let us look! (*All move about.*)

First S.

Ah, there resumes the terrible warfare
Commencing when Sakuni dragged Draupadi by the hair
After the fatal gambling match. Duelling with ponderous maces,
Battling back and forward, shifting their stances and their places,
A mortal fight is fought by Bhimasena, the Pandava,
And the proud Kuru emperor, the god-like Duryodhana,
Frantic at the slaughter of all his hundred brothers,
Men whom Duryodhana honored above all others.
The Kuru and Pandava clans witness their frightful blows.

Second S.

A tempest rains on Bhima's chest and in the fearful throes
Of anger both contestants bare their breasts like burnished gold.
Din of the strokes that fall like hail is to the heavens unrolled.
On Duryodhana's shoulders, harder than the trunk
Of Indra's sacred elephant, Bhima's blade has sunk.

Third S.

The emperor shakes his quivering crest and, with his body dwarfed,
Crouching and glaring wildly, he swings his mace aloft,
Until the blood in Bhima's breast as turbulently shines
As avalanches pouring down precipitous inclines
Of Mount Kailasa, lighted by Indra's lightning flash.

First S.

Yes, on the Pandava chief I hear the mad blows crash
And mark his forehead broken, his huge chest drenched in gore,
His body painted crimson, as colored waters pour
Down cliffsides on Mount Meru, stained with mineral red.

Second S.

He hurls his mace. He roars and leaps aside; he guards his head

With lifted arms and rains down blows furiously and long.
The emperor is better trained but he is not so strong.

Third S.

Now, matchless in his battles, huge as a mountain throne,
With head and limbs encased in blood, Bhima is overthrown,
Even as the Golden Mountain down whose shoulders rain
Ruddy ores dislodged by storms and carried to the plain.
Seeing Bhima fallen down, Vyasa looks on high,
One finger resting on his bow, his gaze upon the sky.

Second S.

Yudhishthira is dismayed, Vidura blind with tears;
Arjuna's finger grasps his bow, Krishna observes the spheres.

All.

Krishna's elder brother now brandishes his plow.
All for a hushed moment is ominous. But now
The emperor, endowed with pride and royal dignity,
Speaks to his foe in taunting words uttered in mockery:
'Bhima, do not fear, no hero strikes a prostrate foe.'
And with these words of insult he held his weapon low.

Second S.

Now, seeing Bhima mocked, Krishna on the sly
Makes a secret gesture with his hand against his thigh.

Third S.

That sign revived the Wind-God's child and the great Wind-God breathed
New life into his son so that his torments were relieved.
Once more he seizes on his mace, his strength renewed and full,
And rises roaring from the ground like a wildlion-bull.

First S.

The duel of the maces now has started once again.
The Pandu bites his lips and roars and on the blood soaked pl a in
Rubs both his hands and both arms lifted in his dark design—
Forsaking righteous rules of war but following Krishna's sign—
Hurls at once the fatal mace on Duryodhana's thighs.

All.

Look ! The mighty emperor falls !

Third S.

The Kurus' guardian sighs;
Blest Vyasa, seeing the emperor laid low,
Lying on the battlefield in piteous overthrow,
Bled white and dying, turns away now ready to depart
To distant heaven, as death is breaking Duryodhana's heart.
Lightly covering his eyes, the Wielder of the Plow
Shuts his vision, angered that Duryodhana now
Lies vanquished by so foul a thrust. Bhima understands
That menacing face. Now, lifted up in interlacing hands,
While at Vyasa's bidding the Pandavas stride away,
Bhima leans on Krishna's side, offered as crutch and stay.

First S.

Yes, Balarama shuts his eyes in anger at the sight
Of deeds so foul and comes this way to witness Bhima's flight.
His lovely crest in disarray, his eyes dilated red
With rage, he lifts the garlands trailed from one now all but dead.
The bees are on the withered flowers. He lifts the garment high.
He looks like a dim haloed moon new-risen in the sky.

Second S.

Come, fellow soldiers, let us all religiously attend
The fallen emperor !

The Other Two.

You say well. Let's follow to the end !

(*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter Baladeva.*)

Bal.

Halt, great kings ! such treacherous actions are not fair and right.
You are not mindful of my plow; my vengeance shall alight
On those who violate my laws founded from long ago.
He struck at Duryodhana's thighs and laid his kingdom low.—

Ah, Duryodhana, live a little while ! My deathless blade
Quickly plows low the great and strong, making their splendor
fade,
Falling on them by magic, swifter than any thought.
This was the implement that gave relief to men who brought
Oblations to me by the side of Yamuna's broad stream
And cast Asura's ramparts down to vanish as a dream.

(*Voice behind the scenes.*)

Voice.

Mercy, Wielder of the Plow !

Bal.

In his most wretched plight
Duryodhana follows me, his pale limbs dusted white
From ground upon whose floor he crawls as a mere infant would
Or as the serpent, whom the gods and fiends in angry mood
Wounded, dragged to ocean its agonizing chain,
So this great king drags heavily his limbs across the plain.

(*Enter Duryodhana with both thighs broken.*)

Dur.

Why do I live? With both thighs crushed by Bhima's coward
mace,
Who broke all laws of battle, I crawl from place to place,
Dragging my body with my arms, so miserable am I !
Pity me, Wielder of the Plow, and let me quickly die !
For the first time today my head falls at your blessed feet,
Myself now low on earth. Be kind ! My misery is complete.
Cast your angry look away ; show me your kindly face;
Grant victory to the funeral clouds of the lost Kuru race !
The end to this most wretched war now at last is clear.
The causes of our discord cease; all strife is finished here.

Bal.

Ah, Duryodhana, live a little while !

Dur.

But tell me why ?
What do you mean to do ?

Bal.

I'll lift Pandavas to the sky.
They shall live no longer but shall pay the bitter price
Of treachery and be offered to you, a sacrifice.
My plowshare shall pass over them; though they have been before
Their treachery men of strength and power, they shall be thus no more.
My plow will rend their shoulders, shattering breast and bone,
Their stricken bodies plowed to earth, scattered and overthrown.

Dur.

Do not say that ! For Bhima only fulfilled his vow.
My brothers dead, my anger passed, what can this war do now?

Bal.

That man has made me angry, a warrior's counterfeit !

Dur.

You think that I was tricked by him?

Bal.

There is no doubt of it.

Dur.

No matter, for I pay the price and so conclude my days.
Bhima once had the wit to save him from a house ablaze.
Embattled in Kubera's home, he matched an avalanche
Of foes and there destroyed the fiend Hidimba, root and branch.
If you say Bhimasena slew me by his treachery here,
Then I remain unvanquished, my honor firm and clear.

(*Voice behind the scene.*)

Voice.

Make way, make way !

Bal.

Ah, the blind king, Dhritarashtra comes
Led by his son and aged wife, with bandaged eyes, their grooms
And women of the palace following after, in their grief
Hoping to give by sympathy their noble prince relief.

The blinded king has dignity descended from of old,
His massive arms are sacrificial pillars decked with gold.
Seeing him mighty at his birth, the high gods struck him blind,
Fearing him a rebellious leader for all humankind.

(*Enter Dhritarashtra with Gandhari, two Queens and Durjaya.*)

Dhr.

Where are you, my loved child?

Queens.

My lord !

Gand.

Ah where are you, my son ?

Dhr.

Today I learn that by a trick of war you were undone.
My blind face now is blinder because of blinding tears.

Gand.

Are you still there?

Dur.

Still bound to life, crushed in the prime of years !

Queens.

Ah, Majesty !

Dur.

Ah, misery ! Even my queens are wailing !
Before I had hardly felt the blow or knew my life was failing.
I feel it fully now that all my womenfolk have come
With hair flung loose, sad witness to my miserable doom.

Dhr.

Gandhari, can you see the royal champion of our clan ?

Gand.

Your Majesty, I cannot see.

Dhr.

What, not see such a man !
am cursed that I cannot view such a noble son.

There were a hundred sons of mine; now all their days are done.
I shall not deserve the grace of having any child
Spread the sacrificial grains when I at length have died.

Gand.

Speak to me, my dearest child, and to his Majesty.

Bal.

Ah, the wretched queen, how pitiful a thing to see !
Her eyes were never wet before, looking upon her brood
Of sons and grandsons slain but now she loses fortitude
On viewing Duryodhana's fall. Her vow for many years
Has placed this bandage on her eyes that now is soaked in tears.

Dhr.

My noble son, whom eighteen armies guard, where now are you ?

Dur.

A mighty king indeed today !

Dhr.

My son, speak what is true !

Dur.

Indeed, I have another tale to tell; my state is plain.

Dhr.

Come here to me, my son.

Dur.

I'll come.—Father, I fall again !
This is a second blow to me; my misery is complete,
For now I cannot fall in prayer before my father's feet.
Bhima has not robbed me of my strong thighs alone
But for this second robbery I still more deeply groan.

Gand.

Come, my daughters !

Queens.

We are here.

Gand.

Go, comfort his distress !

Queens.

We bow before our lord.

Dhr.

Who guides me now and pulls my dress?

Durjaya.

Grandfather, it is I.

Dhr.

Go, go, your service is required;
Look to your father, my good child!

Durjaya.

Grandfather, I am tired.

Dhr.

Then run along, my son, and rest upon your father's knee.

Durjaya.

Grandfather, I obey you.—but is this really he?

Dur.

Oh, is he also come? My love is strong, but this mishap
Utterly forbids the lad from resting on my lap.
What will my innocent child exclaim, whose life has never known
Sorrow, when he finds that I have lost both power and throne?

Durjaya.

Here is father on the ground beside a weeping throng!

Dur.

Why have you come to me, my son?

Durjaya.

You were away so long.

Dur.

Even now my heart burns for my son.

Durjaya.

I'll sit upon your lap.

Dur.

My boy, you are unconscious of this terrible mishap.
This child, this tender crescent moon, was once my heart's desire,
And now the very sight of him lights a consuming fire.

Durjaya.

Why can't I rest upon your knee?

Dur.

Our happy days are through;
You cannot rest here any more as you were wont to do.

Durjaya.

Why, do you plan to go away?

Dur.

I go to join my brothers.

Durjaya.

Take me with you!

Dur.

No, no! Go talk to Bhima and these others.

Durjaya.

Go, father, all these people here long to speak with you.

Dur.

Who are they?

Durjaya.

My grandparents and all these ladies, too.

Dur.

You go, my son. I cannot go.

Durjaya.

I'll guide you.

Dur.

No, my dear,
You are too young to lead me.

Durjaya.

Ladies, the king is here.

Queens.

O tragic king!

Dhr.

Where is the king?

Gand.

Where is my dearest child?

Durjaya.

There he is sitting on the ground.

Dhr.

Has the king grown so mild?
He was a golden image for all men to adore
And now he lies, a shattered bolt, broken from a door.

Gand.

My child, are you exhausted?

Dur.

I am yours in everything.

Dhr.

Who's that?

Gand.

It's I who gave you fearless sons, great king.

Dur.

Now today I truly feel that I am born again.
Come, father, there is now no longer cause for fear or pain.

Dhr.

Why should I be anxious, son? Your hundred brothers fed
Their lives with arrogance but now, when you are dead, all's
dead. (*Falls.*)

Dur.

Look, our lord has fallen! Father, console your queen!

Dhr.

What consolation can I give in such a fearful scene?

Dur.

Why, say that I died facing my foe. My father, slake
Your grief with pride, restrain those tears, if only for my sake!
I bow my crest before your feet, holding all else in scorn,
Mindless of pain, I die today, proudly as I was born.

Dhr.

I am an old man, blind from birth, with no desire to live.
Grief for my sons consumes my soul; life has no more to give.

Bal.

He has no hope now for his son; his countenance is bowed.
I have no spirit to announce myself before this crowd.

Dur.

I ask a favor.

Gand.

Speak, my son !

Dur.

After my final strife
With timely death, be you my mother in a second life !

Gand.

I have also wished it.

Dur.

My wife, Malavi, hear !
My forehead and my shoulders, shattered by mace and spear,
Over my breast for necklaces descends a sacred smear
Of blood. My two arms, look you, are royally adorned.
Why should my condition be gratuitously mourned ?
Your husband's wounds are bracelets; why should you weep with woe
When your warrior-husband fell, facing his equal foe ?

Mal.

I am a girl, your wedded wife, and so I weep and wail.

Dur.

Listen in turn, Pauravi ! We, without let or fail,
Performed all sacrifices that scriptures have decreed.
We have ever supported our kinsmen in their need.
Our promises to kith and kin were such as brave men keep.
With pride recall my glory. Wives of such men do not weep.

Paur.

My lord, I know what brave wives do ! I'll weep no more today.

Dur.

Listen, son, to me !

Dhr.

Gandhari, what is he to say ?

Gand.

That I am thinking also.

Dur.

Obey, my noble son,
All the Pandava chieftains as you hitherto have done
With me. Honor their women, as Abhimanyu's mother,
Kunti, Draupadi, cause of war, along with every other.
Mourn for me no more, my son, but think of one who fell
Facing his foe in battle, living and dying well,
His heart inspired with noble thoughts, unquenchable in pride.
Then touch Yudhishthira's arm, kneeling at his side,
And beg him for my funeral rites to follow in due course !

Bal.

Ah, hostility, it seems, now melts into remorse !
What is that noise I hear? For now the sounds of fighting cease,
The clash of arms is over, the battlefield at peace.
Its ground is laden with dead men, their chariots, spears and bows;
Who, then, is twanging at his bow, frightening the flocks of crows?

(*Voice behind the scenes.*)

Voice.

As priests come to the sacrifice, I join this battle rite,
As first I came when Duryodhana's bow commenced the fight.

Bal.

Ah ! here comes Asvatthama, the great preceptor's child,
His large eyes clear as lotus blooms, peaceable and mild,
His arms outstretched in blessing, gold robes on his breast,
Resplendent as Mount Meru with a rainbow on its crest.

(*Enter Asvatthama.*)

Asv.

As a priest come to the sacrifice, I join this battle rite,
As first I came, when Duryodhana's bow commenced the fight.
Listen to me, great lords of war, though now the lords of death,
Where few survive and life for you ebbs out at every breath!
Though serpents from two oceans rend tormented limbs today
Where two opposing forces meet, listen to what I say!
It is the Kuru king, not I, lies wounded in the thigh;
His comrade, Karna, had his sword broken in two, not I.
I am the sage Drona's son, armed with integrity,
But what to me were praise in war without the victory?
My sword is drawn, yet well I know there is no further cause
For battle. Duryodhana fell when battle's sacred laws
Were rudely violated and I in piety
Attended to my father's last and final obsequy.
Who would believe it? Sovereigns from eleven armies stood
With folded hands awaiting the command with hardihood.
Drona's and Parasurama's darts crushed Bhishma's armor-plate.
It's clear the hero Duryodhana fell by force of fate.—
Now where is old Gandhari's son? Where is the Kuru lord!—
Ah, here he is, surrounded by the wreckage of his horde
Of dead men, steeds and elephants, come at last to rest,
His hair dishevelled, fallen upon his wounded chest,
Massive limbs distorted by mace-wounds in the fight,
A stony seat his final home, a sun expunged by night. (*going up to him*)

King of the Kurus, how I grieve on seeing your condition!

Dur.

Dear son of my preceptor, this has come from fierce ambition.

Asv.

King of the Kurus, I propose to violate all right.

Dur.

What will you do?

Asv.

Now hear me! Krishna's favorite arms to fight,

Mounting upon his eagle's back, to deal a final blow
With disc and pike, but I shall kill him with my mortal bow
and all the sons of Pandu will be slaughtered by my arm !

Dur.

Do not speak so ! The host now sleeps in unsuspicious calm.
Karna has gone to heaven. Santanu's son is down;
I have lost my kingdom, my warriors and my crown;
My hundred kinsmen fallen, facing their foes in fight,
And I myself, the last, am brought to this ironic plight.—
Preceptor's son, unstring your bow !

Asv.

No, king, my heart denies
Your order, for by treachery these warriors broke your thighs.

Dur.

Do not ! For kings are arrogant. I went to war from pride,
Not justice, and I suffer here because I once denied
Mercy to others, dragging Draupadi by the hair
With my own hands, and, gambling, violated what was fair.
Abhimanyu, still a boy, was killed, an innocent child.
How the Pandavas played at dice and later in the wild
And terror-haunted forests passed their lives is no discredit
To me or to my conscience. This in no way breaks my spirit.

Asv.

Nevertheless I take an oath and swear to you tonight
I'll raid the proud Pandava's camp and kill them all in fight.

Bal.

When uttered by the sage's son, prophecies come true.

Asv.

Thanks to you, Balarama !

Dhr.

Poor lad, more shame to you !

Asv.

Come to me, Durjaya, though you are unannointed,
By any priest in royal state, you are by me appointed

Sovereign of this kingdom, son of a valorous sire,
Best fitted for the throne and all its dignities require.

Dur.

My soul's desire is now fulfilled. The thread of life wears thin.
I see my reverend ancestors, Santanu and my kin;
My hundred brothers greet me, Lord Krishna at their head;
The youthful Abhimanyu, rising glorious from the dead,
Riding on Indra's elephant, rebukes me for the harm
I did him, while Mahendra supports him with his palm.
Urvasi and her sister nymphs assemble at my side,
The Ganges and the sacred Oceans float me on their tide.
Death herself has sent me her swan-drawn, sacred car
To carry me to Paradise where the immortals are.

(*They cover him with a cloth.*)

Dhr.

I leave now for the penance groves where time serenely runs,
My realm on earth made valueless by loss of all my sons.

Asv.

I leave now, bow in hand, to kill Pandavas while they sleep—
May the great king destroy his foes, govern us and keep!

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

VIKRAMORVASIYAM

by

Kalidasa

Rendered into English Verse

by

Henry W. Wells

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Pururavas, son of Buddha, grandson of the moon, a king

Manavaka, a Brahman

Chamberlain

Chitraratha, king of the Gandharvas, musicians of Heaven

Two Disciples of Bharata, preceptor of the arts in Heaven

Ayus, son of Pururavas

Charioteer

Queen Ausinari, wife of Pururavas

Urvashi, an Apsaras, or nymph of Heaven

Nipunika, maid to Ausinari

Chitralekha, Sahajanya, Rambha and Menaka, Apsarasas

Satyavati, a hermitress

A Huntress

Narada, a divine sage, son of Brahma

Attendants on the king and queen

VIKRAMORVASIYAM

Act One

Benediction

May the great Lord Shiva make you blest
Whose spirit, as the blessed one declares—
Reached solely through religious contemplation—
Permeates all realms of earth and air!
He is the only deity whose scope
Is infinite, though private in our hearts,
Known, when our breathing and sensations cease,
Lord of the universe in all its parts. (1)

Stage-Manager (*entering and looking back towards the curtain*).
Enough of ide prayers!—Ho, my assistart,
Come here promptly!

Assistant (*entering*). Here I am, my master.

Stage-Manager. My friend, our audience has often seen
Productions of the plays of the old masters,
So today I shall present a work
Never heard before, that we have called
'The Hero and Urvashi,' Therefore tell
Each actor to be careful in his part.

Assistant. I shall do as your honor orders me. (*Exit.*)

Stage-Manager (*to the audience*). Now I must speak especially to you.
Noble and worthy audience, kindly listen
With full attention to this drama, written
By Kalidasa, in fondness to our actors
Who are your devoted servants, or
For reverence to our hero, great Pururavas.

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Save her, save her, if anyone is friend of the gods or able to move about in heaven!

Stage-Manager. Ha! what is this faint cry that interrupts me
As the plaintive call of the sea-falcon? (*thinking*) I see:

That divine woman and fairest Apsaras,
Offspring of the thigh of the great saint
Narayana, is arrested by the foes
Of heaven. Her sisters utter their complaint
In pitiful calls. Midway on her return
From her ceremonial visit paid
To Mount Kailasa's Lord, fiends captured her
And so her friends are clamoring for aid. (2)

(*Enter a company of Apsarasas, including Menaka, Sahajanya and Rambha.*)

All. Save her, save her, if anyone is friend
Of the gods or able to move about in heaven!

(*King Pururavas enters, throwing aside the curtain. He is in his chariot, driven by his charioteer.*)

King. Cease, cease your crying! I am Pururavas
Come to your aid, returning from Sun-worship.
Tell me how I can save you and from whom?

Rambha. From a demon's violence.

King. How, has a demon's
Arrogance dared injure you?

Menaka. Yes, hear me!
She who is great Indra's tender sword
When he dreads austerities among the saints,
She who shamed Lakshmi, arrogant of her beauty,
She, the joy of heaven, she, our dear comrade,
Urvashi, was returning from Kubera's
Palace when the demon, Keshi, lord
Of Hiranyapura, golden city of snows,
Captured both her and her dear friend, Chitralekha.

King. Can you tell me on what path the fiend has fled?

Sahajanya. To the North-East.

King. Well, then, dismiss your sorrow!
I shall attempt to rescue your dear friend.

All. This is worthy of one who is half a deity.

King. Where will you wait for me?

All. On Mount Hemakuta.

King. Charioteer, turn the horses' heads North-East
And drive them with the speed of wildest wind!

Charioteer. I shall obey your Majesty. (*He does so.*)

King. (*noting the chariot's speed*). Well done!
Driven at this speed I soon could overtake
The God of Eagles, even if he started
Far ahead, so I can surely reach
One who has offended mighty Indra.

Wind from my flight has caused the thunder-clouds
Like frightened and astonished dust to reel
Before my chariot and an inner circle
Revolve with blinding speed, wheel within wheel.
The plumes upon my horses' heads are stiff
As in a picture, while my banner flies
Straight as an arrow from its banner-pole,
A graven image carved upon the skies. (3)

(*Exeunt the King and Charioteer.*)

Rambha. Come, my friends, to the appointed place
Of meeting on the Mountain Hemakuta.
(*The others show agreement and all mime their descent to the crest of the mountain.*)

Rambha. Do you believe the royal sage is able
To remove this dart of fear from out our hearts?

Menaka. Never doubt it! Indra himself appoints him
Leader of the victorious hosts of heaven.

Rambha. May he be victorious now!

Sahajanya (*after a pause*). Breathe freely, friend,
Breathe freely! I see the king's moon-chariot
With his deer-emblazoned banner streaming
In the wind of its own speed. He cannot come
Without the news of victory.

(*All look upward. Enter the King, his charioteer and Urvashi, her eyes closed in terror. She leans on Chitralekha.*)

Chitralekha. Breathe freely,
My dearest friend, breathe freely!

King. Come, take heart,
My girl from heaven, take heart! Be comforted:

Fear no more, timid one! The wielder of
Heaven's thunderbolt has overcome your foe;
He guards all worlds. Open your large, dark eyes
As the lotus opens in the morning's glow! (4)

Chitralekha. Ah, her violent breathing is her only
Sign of life. She has not gained consciousness.

King. She has been terrified by mortal fears:

Her flower-soft heart is throbbing in her chest
As seen by ointments trembling on her breast. (5)

Chitralekha. Friend, quiet yourself! Be cheerful and composed!
No one seeing you in this confusion
Would believe that you could be a daughter of heaven.

(*Urvashi recovers consciousness.*)

King. Ah, your friend has come to life again.

The daughter of heaven slowly becomes herself
As smoke blows off from some fire-ravaged wood,
As night, when moonlight dawns on its horizon,
As Ganges, clearing from a turbid flood. (6)

Chitralekha. Friend, take heart! The enemy of gods is vanquished.

Urvashi (*opening her eyes*). Who could have done this? Ah,
can it be Indra,
Whose vision and whose might control all things?

Chitralekha. No, not Indra. Pururavas, the royal sage,
As mighty as Indra.

Urvashi (*seeing the King; aside*). Demons did me kindness!

King (*aside*). Ah, who can be surprised that all the Apsarasas
Attempting to seduce the sage, Narayana,
Blushed when they saw this fairer girl who sprang
From off his thigh? But perhaps she did not do so.

Possibly the clear moonlight begot her,
Or the God of Love endowed her with his powers,
Or possibly the Spring itself produced her
As the quintessence of his brightest flowers;
For how could an old anchorite, grown dull
With study of the cold Vedantic law,
Whose thirst for pleasure had been long extinguished,
Beget such beauty, holding us in awe? (7)

Urvashi. Friend, where are our companions?

Chitralekha. Our savior knows.

King. They are in great trouble, lady. I must tell you:

Even one who sees you for a moment only
Must miss you ever after; then how true
It must be that your dear and close companions
Will be dissolved in grief when missing you? (8)

Urvashi (*aside*). His language shows nobility. But who
Would wonder if nectar issued from the moon?
(*aloud*) That is why I long to see them again.

King (*pointing*). Look, lovely spirit, there are your loyal friends

Who on the highest Himalayan peak
See you renewed in freshness like the moon
Freed from a cloud. These are the ones you seek. (9)

Chitralekha. Look there, dear friend!

Urvashi (*looks longingly at the King*). Engulf me in your love,
Dear friends!

Chitralekha. What friends?

Urvashi. My old companions there.

Rambha (*joyfully*). See here comes the royal sage, who brings
Urvashi and her comrade, Chitralekha.
Now this moon-king indeed is like the moon,
The constellation of the Twins beside him!

Menaka (*observing*). We are twice fortunate. Our friend has been
Recovered and this royal sage unhurt.

Sahajanya. You are right. But demons must be hard to conquer.

King. Charioteer, here is the crest of the great mountain.
Descend!

Charioteer. I shall do as my great lord commands. (*He obeys.*)

King (*showing that he has been jolted by landing; aside*).
Ah the rough landing on the rugged surface
Of the mountain has become a blessing to me:

The jolting of my car that caused my shoulder's
Pressure on her nobly rounded hips
Makes my flesh bloom as earth suspiring flowers,
Leaving my shoulder engulfed in love's eclipse! (10)

Urvashi (*blushing*). Friend, move aside a little.

Chitralekha. Dear, I cannot.

Rambha. Come, let us pay homage to the king, our savior!

King. **While this lady with the noble forehead**
And all her eager friends, good charioteer,
Urge us to meet them, as the Spirit of Spring
Beckons his flowers and foliage, stop here! (11)

All. Bravo, victorious Majesty! Joy to you!

King. And to you, lady, and to your companions!

Urvashi (*descending from the chariot, aided by Chitralekha*).
Friends, embrace me closely. I had given up hope
Of ever meeting you in heaven again. (*Her friends embrace her.*)

Rambha. Your Majesty, guard the earth a hundred eons!

Charioteer. King, I hear the sound of some strange chariot,
Rushing in hot haste toward us from the East.

Descending on our Himalayan peak,
Some hero rushes toward us from on high,
Wearing ornaments of burnished gold,
A stormcloud darting lightning through the sky. (12)

(*The Apsarasas look upward.*)

All. Ah, it is Chitraratha, the archangel!

(*Chitraratha enters and views the King with deep respect.*)

Chitraratha. Your Majesty is glorious in valor;
Indra acknowledges his obligation.

King. Welcome, Lord of Gandharvas, my dear friend!

Chitraratha. King, Narada told me that Urvashi
Was seized by Keshi and that he had ordered
The army of Gandharvas for her rescue.
But presently we heard the noble bards
Chanting the panegyric of your triumph.
Now will your gracious Majesty consent
To visit Indra, taking her with you.—
Your Majesty has served great Indra well.

Once the sage Narayana gave to Indra
Urvashi to become his joy and care.
Now once more will she be given to him,
Rescued by you out of the demon's snare. (13)

King. Not so. He speaks too flatteringly of me:

When the servants of the storm-god conquer
His enemies, it is through the god's own might
Supporting them, just as the lion's roar
Echoing from cliffs puts elephants to flight. (14)

Chitraratha. Your modesty embellishes your deeds.

King. Friend, this time make apologies to Indra
From me and lead Urvashi to him yourself!

Chitraratha. I obey you, king.—Ladies, this way, this way!
(*The Apsarasas start to leave.*)

Urvashi (*aside*). Dear Chitralekha, I find I am unable
To leave the royal sage, though he has laid
That duty on me. Give my excuse to Indra!

Chitralekha. Your Majesty, my friend Urvashi requests
That rather than she, still troubled by her plight,
Should go to Indra, I, instead, should give him
The news of your triumphant victory.

King. Good bye, then, till we shortly meet again!
(*All mime ascending into the sky.*)

Urvashi (*appearing to fall*). Oh, my garland of pearls has caught in a bush
(*turning round*) Chitralekha, help untangle this!

Chitralekha (*smiling*). Surely, caught too fast and I'm afraid
It will not easily be disengaged.
However, I shall try.

Urvashi. Then keep your word.
(*Chitralekha mimes liberating her.*)

King (*aside*). You have done me a sweet service, thorny plant,
By holding her in brief captivity,
For now I mark her throwing close side-glances
From her half-averted face to me. (15)

Charioteer. My lord, observe this sign of peace and victory:
This is the shaft with which god Vayu hurled
The demon enemies of Indra low
In the salt ocean; now it seeks its quiver
As some great dragon into its lair might go. (16)

King. Bring me my chariot and I shall mount it!
(*The Charioteer does so; the king climbs into it. Urvashi signs, glances again at the king, and leaves, with Chitraratha.*)

King (*looking in the direction taken by Urvashi*). Ah, love desires what never can be won:

This heavenly girl ascends her father's skies
While here below in watching her depart
Farther and farther from me, I perceive
She bears on high torn tendons of my heart. (17)

So a great swan might tear a lotus bloom
With fierce and furious wrench, then, mounting, seek
The highest heavens, carrying aloft
A bleeding petal, dangling from its beak. (*Exeunt.*)

Act Two

Manavaka (*entering*). Oh, I shall burst if I keep the king's secret a moment longer. I shall never be able to guard my tongue when I am in company, just as a Brahman can never keep from overstuffing his belly when he is invited to supper. So I shall stay here in the lonely outskirts of the palace and wait until my royal friend leaves his council-chamber.

Nepunika (*entering; aside*). Her gracious Majesty, queen Ausinari, has given precise instructions to me, her maid, Nipunika. She says that her lord, king Pururavas, has been strangely vacant-minded since his mission to the Sun God. So she asks me to find from his good friend, Manavaka, what causes all this trouble. But how can I hoodwink that learned Brahman? Still, he can no more hold the king's secret than a blade of grass the morning dew. I'll search for him (*walking and looking about*) O, that is certainly the man, sitting for some absurd reason as motionless as a picture of a monkey. I shall go to him.—Ho, there, I salute you!

Manavaka. And I bow to you. (*aside*) Strange, the moment I see that scoundrely servant-girl, the king's secret fairly explodes from my heart. (*aloud*) Tell me, Nipunika, what are you doing, wandering about here and deserting your music-practice?

Nipunika. The queen herself has sent me to speak with your worship.

Manavaka. What does her Majesty command?

Nipunika. Her Majesty asks me to say that your worship has always been friendly to her and will not desert her in time of serious trouble.

Manavaka. Can my friend have hurt her in any way?

Nipunika. Yes indeed. The King absent-mindedly addressed her in the name of the woman who is the only cause of the king's depression.

Manavaka (*aside*). So his Majesty has let out the secret himself! Why should I torture myself by holding my tongue? (*aloud*) So, did he call her Urvashi? Since he saw that Apsaras, he has been beside himself. He has vexed not only her Majesty but, what is much worse, myself, by turning away from all sports and pleasures.

Nipunika (*aside*). Well, I have invaded the citadel of the king's secret. (*aloud*) Manavaka, what can I possibly say to her Majesty?

Manavaka. Tell her that to begin with I shall try my best to dissuade his Majesty from running after that mirage. Also, that shortly I shall pay the queen my respects.

Nipunika. I shall do as you command. (*Exit.*)

Bard (*behind the curtain*). Hail to our Lord, whose function is to follow

The daily movements of our Lord, the Sun !
You chase the shades of darkness from your subjects
As night is vanquished by the day begun.
And as the Sun-God seems to pause in heaven,
Pouring down vertically his noon-time ray,
So you relax your labors for a moment
During the sixth division of the day. (1)

Manavaka (*listening*). Ah, my royal friend has left his seat
Of judgment and comes here where I shall greet him !

King (*entering*). Since I have seen that heavenly girl, my heart

Is conquered in that lamentable manner
Known to all victims of the God of Love
Vanquished beneath his fish-emblazoned banner. (2)

Manavaka (*aside*). Well may Queen Ausinari be annoyed !

King. Friend, I trust you keep my secret safe.

Manavaka (*troubled, aside*). That rascally maid has cheated me, if not,

My friend would never have addressed me so.

King (*surprised*). Why don't you answer ?

Manavaka. It's because you tied

My tongue so tight I scarcely speak at all.

King. Good ! Now tell me, where shall we be amused ?

Manavaka. Why, in the kitchen.

King. How does that appear ?

Manavaka. Oh, the very sight of the arrangements

Of the five basic ways of cooking food

Will dissipate all melancholy thoughts.

King (*smiling*). You may be pleased there just because the treasures

You covet lie so readily at hand,

But what diversion can I possibly find

To my own unattainable desires?

Manavaka. May I ask you, friend, if you have seen Urvashi?

King. Why certainly ! What do you make of that ?

Manavaka. Why then, I would not call her unattainable.

King. You show your partiality for me.

Manavaka. Your words excite my curiosity.

Is she as beautiful as I am ugly ?

King. You must know, Manavaka, it's impossible

To describe her accurately, limb by limb,

But I shall offer you a brief description.

Manavaka. I am eager to hear it.

King. Manavaka, know

Her person bestows splendor on her jewels,

Not they on her. She is not to be measured

By foreign standards but is herself the touchstone

Of all that beauty offers to men's eyes.

Manavaka. I see your Majesty has taken the vow
Of the chataka bird who drinks alone
Raindrops in air and never wets his beak
With any water ever soiled by earth.

King. Only a solitary spot is solace
To one striken down by separation.
So lead the way into the royal garden.

Manavaka (*aside*). Heaven help me ! (*aloud*) Come, my lord, this way !
(*walking*) This southern breeze, as though it were deputed
To serve you and to greet you, starts to blow
Across the beds to meet you as its guest.

King (*looking*). This is a fitting tribute to the wind:

He impregnates the madhavi tree
And makes the kaundi dance; thus as a lover
He comes to one and as a master of
Civility, he flows into the other. (3)

Manavaka. Your love is equally gracious, kindly and warm.
(*walking*) Look, here we are. Please come !

King. Friend, enter first !

(*Both enter.*)

King (*looking about*). My friend, I fear this royal garden here
Offers no remedy for my distress.

I eagerly desired to see the garden
But now I find its remedy a dream.
I am as one who in a desperate plight
Swims against the current of the stream. (4)

Manavaka. How can that be ?

King. Listen, and I shall tell you.

I am tormented by the merciless god
Who with five shafts, my senses, murders me
Through hopeless longings for the unattainable,
An unquenchable thirst for what can never be.

How much more, then, must my poor spirit suffer
Seeing this delightful garden here
Where fragrant winds from the Malayan Mountains
As old leaves drop make fresh green shoots appear? (5)

Manavaka. Do not despond. Shortly this southern wind
Will be the very source of your delight.

King. Thank you ! I take a Brahman's word as truth. (*They walk about.*)

Manavaka. Your Highness should remark this garden's beauty
That indicates the advent of the spring.

King. Every bush shows the truth of your remark:

This courbouc's flower, red as a young girl's nail,
Darkening toward its edges, blooms the first;
This young ashoka blossoms into flame
As love itself out of the trunk had burst.
These pistils on the chuta boughs are fuming
With golden dust, protruberant, uncouth;
The vernal impulse is a ruthless force
Urging childhood forward into youth. (6)

Manavaka. This bower of atimukta vine provides
A marble seat to ease your Majesty.
The blooms, showered down through contact with the bees,
Appear to bow in worship of yourself.
Accept its favors and be seated here !

King. As you desire me !

Manavaka. Now that you're at ease
Your Majesty may dissipate your longing
For lost Urvashi; your all-devouring eyes
May be attracted by this tree's green tendrils.

King (*sighing*). Friend, I am only maddened by the sight.

All lovely images dissolve in love.
Do not tempt me with flower-studded branches !
See what your friendship has been guilty of ! (7)

Think of some other means to ease my grief !

Manavaka (*laughing*). Yes. But remember, a divine physician
Failed to cure mighty Indra of his love
For Ahalya; so, then, how could I
Cure you of your mad passion for Urvashi.
You both are equally out of your wits.

King. Do not say this. Friendship is always helpful.

Manavaka. Well, I will think of it. But you must not
Disturb my meditation with your sighs. (*Appears to be thinking.*)

King (*aside*). Though this girl is unattainable,

As distant and as lovely as the moon,
An auspicious throbbing in my shoulder tells me
My passion will be consummated soon. (8)

(*He rises and shows revived hopes. Urvashi and Chitralekha enter through the sky.*)

Chitralekha. Where are you going without telling me
The object of your flight ?

Urvashi. Why do you ask me
When I recall your heartless laughing at me
When, about to fly into the heavens
From the bleak summit of Mount Hemakuta,
My dress was tangled in a thorny vine ?

Chitralekha. What ? Are you journeying to Pururavas ?

Urvashi. True, and I cast all modesty aside.

Chitralekha. What herald is there to announce your visit ?

Urvashi. Only my heart.

Chitralekha. I wish you had been more thoughtful.

Urvashi. Why, what is there more to be considered ?
Indra, himself enjoined this action on me.

Chitralekha. Well, I have nothing more to say.

Urvashi. Then show me
The path, that no disturbance may intrude.

Chitralekha. Do not be troubled ! The divine preceptor
Of gods has taught us the hair-tying mystery
Rendering us invisible to god's foes.

Urvashi. Yes, I had forgot it.

Chitralekha. Here we are come
In the air above the holy confluence
Of Ganges and the Yamuna, at whose juncture
The city of Pururavas, like a crest
Worn by a hero, lies mirrored in the waves.

Urvashi. Why, this may well be heaven transferred to earth.
Where is the king who pities the distressed ?

Chitralekha. We may find him in this pleasure garden,
Which in truth seems a colony of heaven. (*Both descend to earth.*)

Chitralekha. Here he is, friend, and hospitable to you
As moon-bright air appears to the full moon.

Urvashi. Friend, his Majesty appears even nobler
Than when I saw him last.

Chitralekha. Step closer to him.

Urvashi. Let me overhear him for a while,
Standing beside him in invisibility.
He is talking with some friend.

Chitralekha. Do as you wish.

Manavaka. Friend, I have hit upon a plan affecting
Your union with that unattainable love. (*The king remains silent.*)

Urvashi. Who can this woman be to whom he sues
And who regards herself so far above him ?

Chitralekha. Why do you veil the truth with ignorance ?

Urvashi. I fear to preceive it with my diviner eye.

Manavaka. I said I have contrived a remedy.

King. Then inform me quickly what it is.

Manavaka. Just go to sleep, my Lord, for in your dreams

All such happy unions are effected
Then recreate her in a painted image
Precisely as your vision has directed. (9)

Urvashi. Weak heart, take courage !

King. Both remedies are false.

How can I sleep when love robs me of sleep ?
Or how could I, my eyes blinded with tears,
Even if I could recapture sleep,
Retain whatever image of her appears. (10)

Chitralekha. You hear him ?

Urvashi. I do, but scarcely believe my ears.

Manavaka. This is my limit of ingenuity.

King (*sighing*). She cannot know my spiritual agony,

Or, knowing by magic powers, gives it no heed.
May the five-arrowed god of love, perceiving
My helpless state, cure me and leave me freed ! (11)

Chitralekha. You hear him ?

Urvashi. How wretched that he must think me cold !
Owing to my invisibility,
I am unable to appear before him,
So may I have permission to convey
My meaning by inscription on a birch-leaf ?

Chitralekha. You have my permission. Here it is.
(*Hands her a leaf. She writes rapidly on it; then drops it near them.*)

Manavaka. Good heavens ! Has a serpent crawled between us?

King (*calmly picking it up*). No, it's a birch-leaf with some writing on it.

Manavaka. Perhaps, my lord, the Apsaras, Urvashi,
Hearing your honor's pitiful lamentations,
Being invisible, sends you this message
Just to convince you of her equal love.

King. Fancy is mad and conjures anything. (*He reads it joyfully.*)
—But, friend, your guess was absolutely right.

Manavaka. Oblige me, my lord, and tell me what it says.

Urvashi. Indeed, you are a knowing citizen !
Listen:

'Lord, if I were only what you take me
To be, how could I cause the southern breeze
To blow on the hot body of my lover,
Tossed side to side under the flowering trees ?' (12)

Urvashi. What will he say to this ?

Chitralekha. Why, he already
Answers with limbs pale as thin lotus stalks.

Manavaka. Joy to you, friend, who has received already
The joy I comprehend in a good meal !

King. What is your joy, my friend, compared to mine:

This leaf-borne lyric shows the love I feel
Equally matched by hers whose love I seek.
Reading it, I seem as if bewitched
By loving eyes and cheek pressed close to cheek. (13)

Urvashi. Now the love I feel is fully shared.

King. Friend, hold this note in your untroubled hand.
My hand is moist and wipes the letters out.

Manavaka. How can you fear she will not fructify
Your love for her when hers already blooms ?

Urvashi. I am timid, dear, and must compose my spirits.
Please speak kind words to him concerning me !

Chitralekha (*removing her invisibility*). Victory, victory to your Majesty !

King. Welcome, good lady. Yet I must confess

Much as waters of the Yamuna
Please the viewer chiefly when they blend
With those of Ganges, so your company
Most charms me when supported by your friend. (14)

Chitralekha. A bank of clouds precedes the lightning's flash.
Manavaka (*aside*). What ! this is not Urvashi, but her friend !
Chitralekha. Urvashi begs of you with bended brow—
King. What is it that Urvashi would command ?
Chitralekha. Your Majesty, she says, gave her protection

Against dark demons, the gods' enemies,
But she beseeches your compassion on her
Who now finds love far crueller than these. (15)

King. Then my good lady, hear my own response :

You tell me that your fairest friend is struck
With cruel flames of amorous desire,
But, see, Pururavas equally burns.
Let the two irons be welded in one fire ! (16)

Chitralekha (*to Urvashi*). I have borne your message to your love
But find that he is more consumed than you.
Urvashi (*removing her invisibility*). I am afraid that you have played me false.
Chitralekha. Presently we shall see who deserts whom—
Go to him now, with proper ceremony.
Urvashi (*blushing*). Victory to the king !
King. Beautiful one,

I gain the victory, inasmuch as you
Consent to so address me, and I prize
This victory most, knowing you greet no other
Save only Indra of the thousand eyes. (17)

Manavaka. Lady, though a Brahman, I am not saluted !
(*Urvashi bows.*)
Now may prosperity be yours forever !
Celestial Messenger (*behind the curtain*). Chitralekha, hurry with Urvashi :

Indra, in company with all the gods,
Proposes a theatrical today
Perfect in all appointments. She is needed.
Bharata calls; so hurry her away ! (18)

Chitralekha. You hear, my friend, this heavenly messenger.
Ask his Majesty's consent to leave.

Urvashi. I am utterly reduced to silence.

Chitralekha. Sire, this girl you love so is dependent
Upon the great god's will. She therefore asks
Permission to leave you, for she would not be
Guilty in the all-knowing eyes of heaven.

King (*much troubled*). I am not one to contradict great Indra.
I request only that I be not forgotten.

(*Urvashi leaves, in grief, with Chitralekha.*)

King (*sighing*). Friend, all life seems utterly in vain.

Manavaka. Well, seeming is being (*aside*). Good heavens, when I saw
Urvashi, at first I was so struck with wonder
The birch-leaf letter slipped out of my hand !

King. Friend, you look troubled. What was that you said ?

Manavaka. Do not despair ! Urvashi loves you deeply.
Nothing can eradicate such love.

King. I likewise hope so, for I carefully watched her.

The burden of her grief was indicated
By the violent heavings of her breast;
Her passion was so strong, she lost control
Of her body, whose motions could not be suppressed. (19)

Manavaka (*aside*). My own heart trembles because his Majesty
May presently require the letter back.

King. What can I do to mitigate this grief ?—
Please hand the birch-leaf letter to me, friend !

Manavaka. Oh, dear me, I must ask Urvashi for it
And where is she ?

King. You are a careless fool !
Search all about the garden till you find it.

Manavaka. Probably it is here. Probably it is here. (*He pretends to search.—Enter Queen Ausinari and her attendants, among them Nipunika.*)

Queen. Did you tell the truth, Nipunika,
In saying you saw the king enter this garden
In company with the honorable Manavaka ?

Nipunika. Have I ever told your Highness an untruth ?

Queen. Well then, hidden behind this thick-set vine
I shall overhear his confidences
And so discover if you tell the truth.

Nipunika. Let us do as your Majesty suggests.

Queen. Maid, this is like a cloth the south wind brought.

Nipunika (*inspecting the letter*). O, this is a letter ! Now the wind has turned
The leaf around and shown its underside.
The breeze has blown it smoothly to your feet.
How shall we read it ?

Queen. Read it to yourself.
Then read it to me, if it is fit to hear.

Nipunika. My lady, this looks like the very scandal
I told you of. These must be tender verses
That Urvashi addresses to my lord.
Through the gross carelessness of Manavaka
The south wind brings it to our happy hands.

Queen. Then by all means read its contents to me.

Nipunika. **'Lord, if I were only what you take me (12)**
To be, how could I cause the southern breeze
To blow on the hot body of my lover,
Tossed side to side under these flowering trees ?'

Queen. I shall immediately confront this lover
Holding this amorous letter in my hand. (*She enters the garden-house.*)

Manavaka. What is it, friend, I now see at the edge
Of the garden-mound that neighbours our pavilion,
Drifting slowly in the summer breeze ?

King (*smiling*). Ah, favorable breezes from the South:

Breeze of the spring, what is the gain to you
In blowing my beloved one's letter about
Like perfume from your blossoms ? Well you know
What lovers prize and others only flout. (20)

Nipunika. Lady, the Brahman searches everywhere
To find the letter.

Queen. Quick, let us see that !

Manavaka. Oh, this has proved to be a peacock's feather
Colored like a pale kesara flower.

King. Oh, I am becoming very miserable !

Queen (*approaching*). You have grieved enough. Here is your letter. Take it.

King (*confused*). Ah, Queen, my welcome to you !

Manavaka (*aside*). But this, I think,
Will prove a most unwelcome hour for us !

King (*aside*). Friend, how can this affair be remedied ?

Manavaka. What can a thief do with the goods upon him ?

King (*aside*). Fool, this is not a time for barren jests.
(*aloud*) Madam, this leaf was not what we pursued.
Our searching was for quite another leaf.

Queen. You are only wise to hide good fortune.

Manavaka. Madam, will you order from our kitchen
A brilliant dinner to divert his thoughts ?

Queen. Good maid, the Brahman serves our master well.

Manavaka. Why, lady, ghosts have been appeased by dinner.

King. Blockhead, you are convicting me of guilt !

Queen. The offence is not with him or you, my lord,
But is my presence and I shall retire.

King. **I am the guilty one. You of round thighs**
And stately pace, be merciful to me !
Abandon your resentment, gracious queen !
When the master is grieved, how could the slave go free ! (21)

Queen (*aside*). **I should not let his show of penitence**
Deceive me and melt with a too credulous heart.
I only fear my incivility
In coming here was wrong. We should depart. (22)

(*Exeunt the Queen and her attendants.*)

Manavaka. She left in a storm of anger. You may rise.

King (*rising*). She has reason for her anger, as you should know:

Pleas for forgiveness spoken to discerning
Women, though words are sweet as honeyed dew,
Said without love, can never move the loved one,
Who judge as jewelers know false gems from true. (23)

Manavaka. That at this hour favors your Majesty.
Men with weak eyes must shun a blazing light.

King. No, I still feel affection for my queen,
Even though Urvashi has my soul.
But still, the queen's rejection of my plea
Supports my love for dearest Urvashi.

Manavaka. Your mighty Majesty needs small support
Now help a Brahman hungry for a meal !

King (*looking up*). Truly, it has passed the noon-day hour:
The peacock, powerless to abide the heat,
Seeks coolness by the damp roots of this tree.
The buds of the karnikara flowers
Are forced to open by the six-legged bee.
The wild swan, leaving his sun-heated stream,
Seeks covert by its lotus-shaded brink.
Instead, the parrot in our play-house cage,
Parched and thirsty, clamors for his drink. (*Exeunt.*)

Act Three

(Enter two of Bharata's students.)

First Student. Good Palava, this afternoon you carried
The chair of our preceptor to the throne-room
Of Indra, while I was set to making fires.
So tell me whether Bharata's production
Was pleasing to the celestial audience ?

Second Student. I cannot say whether it pleased or not.
The play was on the theme of Laxmi's love,
Composed by Saraswati's learned hand.
We loved its variegated passions, but.....

First. The break in your description hints a fault.

Second. Now I recall, Urvashi made an error,
Playing the heroine—a mere slip of the tongue.

First. How could that be ?

Second. Urvashi, playing Laxmi,
Was asked by Menaka, dressed as Varuni,
Who of all heroes in the seven worlds
She loved the best.

First. Tell me what followed next.

Second. When she should have named Purushottama,
The name Pururavas escaped her lips.

First. Even our intellect must follow fate.—
The preceptor, I suppose, was angry with her.

Second. Yes, she was cursed by the great sage, Bharata,
But won great Indra's favor.

First. Then what next ?

Second. Bharata's judgment on her was that since
She had forgotten his divine instruction,
She should be banished from the halls of heaven.
At the end of the performance she bowed down

Her head in shame. Then Indra said to her:
'Your heart is loyal to the royal sage,
My friend and victor on my battlefields.
Consideration must be paid to him.
Have your wish, my dear, and live with him
Until he sees your offspring at your side.'

First. This was worthy of Indra, who knows the hearts of others.

Second (*looking at the sun*). Look, while we are idly chatting here
The hour of the preceptor's bath has passed.
Come and attend him at that ceremony! (*Exeunt.*)

Chamberlain (*entering*). Every married man aims to enjoy

Wealth and happiness; then, when oppressed
With age, he leaves his burdens to his sons,
Enjoying at the last his hard-earned rest.
But we poor eunuchs in declining age
Are still compelled to guard the harem door;
Age wastes our limbs and lacerates our souls
But all our services are as before. (1)

Now Queen Ausinari orders me
To bring her lord the word Nipunika
Conveyed before about her solemn vow.
I shall, accordingly, wait on the king
After he finishes his evening prayers.
This ordinary business in the quiet
Of evening in the palace brings us peace.

Dusk falls as drowsy peacocks perch on rods,
Like effigies in stone, dim and unstirred.
Fragrant incense-clouds from evening's prayers
Leave pigeons roosting on the roof-tops blurred. (2)
Holy and old seraglio matrons place
Mellow lamps among the ritual flowers,
Auspicious ornaments to grace the harem,
Gleaming faintly through the vesper hours. (3)

(*looking toward the curtain*)

Ah, his Majesty is coming now,
Circled by servants' torches burning clear.
He seems a moving mountain decked with trees
Blooming with flowers.—I shall await him here. (4)

(*Enter Pururavas and Manavaka.*)

King (*aside*). The day has passed without anxiety,

Court business keeping troubled thoughts at bay,
But how without diverting entertainment
Can I while long evening hours away? (5)

Chamberlain (*entering*). Victory to the king! My lord, her Majesty

The queen bids me to tell you that tonight
The moon will shine upon the porch of jewels
And that she hopes her lord will keep her company
Upon the terrace till the full moon enters
Into the asterism Rohini.

King. My friend, inform the queen that I consent. (*Exit.*)

Chamberlain. I shall do what your Majesty commands.

King. Friend, do you think that what the queen requests
Is really in fulfillment of her vow?

Manavaka. I fancy that her Majesty repents
Her rude repudiation of your prayer
When you bowed down before her and now wishes
To efface the memory.

King. You have judged correctly.

After they deny their husband's wishes,
Proud women often suffer from remorse
Secretly feeling shame to have affronted
His meekness with their obstinacy and force. (6)

Lead me to our terrace set with jewels.

Manavaka. This way, my lord ! Ascend these marble stairs
Inlaid with gems, as beautiful as the waves
Of Ganges, glittering in evening's glow.

King. You go the first. (*They ascend.*)

Manavaka. Look where the moon will rise
Where the horizon now is flushed with light !

King. What you observe, my friend, is surely true:

Darkness has departed from the sky.
Once the Udaya Mountain for a space
Hid the moon's chariot but now she shines
Fair as a woman's hair-encircled face. (7)

Manavaka. Well, I should say, fair as a sugar ball.

King (*smiling*). Food is the theme for gluttons.—Lord of Night,

I bow to you who, living in the sun,
Pour the god's wine in splendor, even as now,
Who slay the darkness and in glory shine
Like the crown-jewel set on Shiva's brow. (*Rises.*) (8)

Manavaka. Be seated, father, at a Brahman's wish,
So that I, too, may sit and take my ease !

King (*sitting and addressing his attendants*).
Now that the moon is shining, what's the need
Of torches ? You may go and take your rest.

Attendants. It is always as your Majesty commands. (*They go out.*)

King. My friend, her Majesty will soon be here.
We are now alone and I can speak my thoughts.

Manavaka. Oh, they are clear. But you may still have hope
Considering the devotion she has shown.

King. True, but my agony is also strong:

My passion, thwarted by her absence, swells
A thousand fold in fierce, tyrannical force,
As some swift river's current meeting rocks
Rises to fury in its frantic course. (9)

Manavaka. The new vitality that stirs your limbs
Augurs the coming of the loved one soon.

King. **I, too, detect new hope, for I can feel**
Sudden throbbing come to my right arm.
Your words as a good Brahman must be true.
Presently I shall escape from harm. (10)

Manavaka. Trust me, a Brahman's word cannot be false.

(*The king appears hopeful. Urvashi enters on the sky-path, in a brilliant dress, with Abhisarika and Chitralekha.*)

Urvashi. (*observing herself*). Chitralekha dear, do you approve
My purple dress with its few ornaments
Such as lovers use upon their journeys ?

Chitralekha. No words of mine are adequate to praise it.
My only wish is that I were Pururavas.

Urvashi. The god of love commands that you should take me
Into the palace of this noble man.

Chitralekha. Here we are in our flight nearing the home
Of him you love, which in its majesty
Seems Mount Kailasa's summit changed by magic
Into the residence of a mortal man.

Urvashi. Then discover by supernatural powers
Where he is and what he may be doing ?

Chitralekha (*aside*). I shall tease her for a while. (*aloud*)
My friend,

At present he is happy and contented,
Having been reunited with a woman
Whom he loves deeply but has long neglected.

(*Urvashi indicates despair.*)

Foolish girl, what else could he be thinking
Except about the fortunes of his dearest ?

Urvashi. I am too simple to grasp your subtle talk.

Chitralekha. Here is the royal sage sitting at ease
With his friend in the Garden of Jewels. We should approach him.

(*Both alight on earth.*)

King. My passion deepens as the night advances.

Urvashi. These vague remarks of his disturb my heart.
Let us remain invisible and hear
His talk until our doubt has been dispersed.

Chitralekha. Yes, if you wish.

Manavaka. Why not sit in the moonlight
To feel the joy of these ambrosial rays ?

King. Neither they nor any medicine can cure me,

Neither a bed of flowers nor cool moonrays,
Nor ointment which tall sandal trees exude,
Nor necklaces of gems can ease a fever
To which my soul and body are subdued
Except that heavenly one or— (11)

Urvashi. Ah, who else ?

King. Some talk about her here in solitude.

Urvashi. My heart has gained its end now that it passes
From me and takes its residence in him.

Manavaka. Yes, also I take comfort when I cannot
Gain the objects close to my desire
By talk about them, such as dainty fruit
Or venison.

King. But these are easily had.

Manavaka. And you, too, will attain your wishes soon.

King. Friend, I am thinking—

Chitralekha. Listen to him, you
Who are so discontented !

Manavaka. Thinking what ?

King. **The shoulder that her side pressed as we rode**
Together in my chariot still has worth
And life in it, indeed is blessed, while all
The rest of my body turns to sullen earth. (12)

Chitralekha. Why do you hesitate ?

Urvashi. Why, friend, the king
Does not condescend to see me, though
I stand immediately before his face.

Chitralekha (*smiling*). You have been in such a haste that you have not
Put off your garment of invisibility.

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Come this way, your royal grace, this way !

Manavaka. Worse luck, the queen is here ! You must be silent.

King. And you must show no trouble in your face.

Urvashi. What shall we do now ?

Chitralekha. We need not worry
Since we are both invisible. The queen
Of the sage appears in penitential dress
As if to observe a solemn fast and vow.
On this account she will not linger here.

(*The Queen enters with her attendants bearing offerings.*)

Queen (*looking at the moon*). Nipunika, the deity of the moon,
With the spotted deer upon him, shines more brightly
Being in the embrace of Rohini.

Nipunuka. Is it not equally the truth, dear lady,
That your husband looks more beautiful with you ?

Manavaka. To me the queen seems singularly cheerful
But I do not know whether this is
Because some happy premonition tells me
That on account of her diminished anger

And holy vow she is going to give me sweetmeats
Or she may seek to propitiate your spirits
Because she shamefully scorned your own prostration.

King. (*smiling*). Well, both are possible but your second thought
Appears to me at least more plausible.

She appears well pleased toward me because she comes
In white, wearing auspicious ornaments,
Her hair adorned with sprouts of sacred grass,
As if to show a placable intent. (13)

Queen (*advancing*). Hail to you, king !

Attendants. Victory to your Majesty !

Manavaka. Long live our queen !

King. The queen is very welcome.

(*He takes her hand and leads her to a seat.*)

Urvashi. Friend, the lady may well be called an empress
For she is splendid as the wife of Indra.

Chitralekha. You speak the truth, showing you are not jealous.

Queen. I have made a vow in reference to my husband
So for a while pardon the trouble I give you !

King. You wrong me. You are gracious and not troublesome.

Manavaka. May such troubles overtake me often

King. What is the vow named ? (*The queen looks at Nipunika, who replies.*)

Nipunika. It is the vow 'husband propitiation.'

King. (*looking at the queen*). How can it possibly be as you say?

How needlessly, dear queen, you who are frail
As a young lotus, bear your vow's vexation ?
When your slave longs anxiously for you
Why should you offer him propitiation ? (14)

Urvashi. Truly, he shows her much consideration.

Chitralekha. Simple girl, do you not recognize
That cunning persons who transfer their hearts
Become more courteous to their former loves ?

Queen (*smiling*). Indeed it is in consequence of my vow
That my good lord now speaks so generously.

Manavaka. Be placable, my lord ! It is not right
To oppose generous and auspicious words.

Queen. Bring the offerings, girls, that I may worship
The moonrays streaming on the jewelled garden.

Attendants. Here are the offerings of sandal ointment
Along with flowers and other fitting tribute.

Queen. Maid, take these presents of food to Manavaka.

Attendant. As you command.—Manavaka, these are yours.

Manavaka (*taking a tray of sweetmeats*). Good fortune to you, queen, and may your fast
Be crowned with imminent and full success !

Queen. My lord, will you step nearer ?

King. Here I am.

Queen (*bowing before the king, with folded hands*). In presence of this pair of deities,
The sacred Constellation of the Twins
And the deer-spotted and celestial moon,
I promise my lord that whatsoever woman
He woos and who desires union with him
Will have from me pure and complete affection.

Urvashi. Friend, I am unclear of her intention
But none-the-less am gratified at heart.

Chitralekha. Dear, your union with your lover will have
No more impediments from this noble queen.

Manavaka (*aside*). When the fisherman, failing in his art,
Sees to his sorrow the wily prey escape,
He attributes to himself religious merit
At having let a threatened life go safe.

(*aloud*) My lady, will my lord, whom you resign
So liberally, still be dear to you ?

Queen. Fool, I wish to make my husband happy
At sacrifice of my own pleasure, so think
Whether he must be dear to me or not !

King. **It is within your power to give me to**
Another or to take me back your slave.
I am not callous, queen, as you suspect me,
Nor unconcerned by what your goodness gave. (15)

Queen. This may be so or not. I have fulfilled
My mission to propitiate my lord.
Come, my girls, it now is time to leave.

King. You do not really favor me, my dear,
If in this manner you foresake me now.

Queen. My lord, I am still faithful to my vow. (*Exit with attendants.*)

Urvashi. Though the king loves the queen, I cannot leave him.

Chitralekha. But why, my dear, despair and leave him now ?

King. Surely, the queen has not gone far away.

Manavaka. O, far enough to be well out of earshot,
And she has left you of her own accord,
Like a sick man whom a doctor finds incurable.

King. Ha ! Manavaka, how I wish Urvashi—

Urvashi. Might attain her goal this very day !

King. **My love in some invisible form might come**
Behind me, covering with her lotus hands
My blinded eyes and murmur in my ears
Soft sounds or let the tinkling bells in band

About her ankles charm me, or that some
Friend might contend with her timidity
Dragging her to this palace step by step
And so after great trials hand her to me ! (16)

Urvashi. Then I should fulfill his wish, my friend.

(*Both she and Chitralekha drop their invisibility; she steps behind the king and covers his eyes.*)

King. Ah, it is she, girl with the lovely hands,
Offspring of the thigh of Narayana !

Manavaka. How can your Majesty be sure of this ?

King. What could be the difficulty of knowing?

No other hands than hers could shoot through all
My morbid body these ecstatic rays.
The great night-blooming lotus opens only
To the cool moon, not to warm sunlit days. (17)

Urvashi (*removing her hands and stepping about*).
Victory to the king !

King. Welcome, my heaven-bred girl !

(*He leads her to the seat beside him.*)

Chitralekha. Is my friend happy ?

King. That is indeed accomplished !

Urvashi. Friend, the king is given me by the queen.
She being my friend, I cherish his embraces.
So do not think that I am rash in this.

Manavaka. What, were you really here before the sunset ?

King. **Though you claim my person as a gift**
Bestowed by Queen Ausinari in good part,
Tell me by what legitimate right you once
Robbed me utterly of my own heart ? (18)

Chitralekha. She has no answer, king. But hear my prayer !

King. I shall give you my entire attention.

Chitralekha. In the hot season following the spring
I must return to heaven again to worship
The Sun God; therefore you, my friend, must act
In such a way that she herself may not
Be lonely and long for heavenly life once more.

Manavaka. What is there worth remembering in heaven ?
People have nothing there to eat or drink
But only stare with pious, fish-like eyes.

King. Forgive me, friend, but you are much in error.

The bliss of heaven is indescribable,
Unforgettable, and all within it thrives.
However, Pururavas will live on earth
Her slave, unshared between his other wives. (19)

Chitralekha. I am favored and satisfied. Have no misgivings,
My dear Urvashi, and grant me leave to go.

Urvashi (embracing her). But, dear, in heaven you will not forget me ?

Chitralekha (smiling). When you are here united with our friend
I must request you to remember me. (*She bows to the king and goes out.*)

Manavaka. Now you look better, having had your wish.

King. This has been my rare and blessed fortune.

I was not so happy having won the rule
Of earth and all kings' jewelled crowns confer
As I today am happy that I bow
Before her feet in servitude to her. (20)

Urvashi. I am powerless to speak any sweeter words.

King (taking her by the hand). How clearly contraries are brought about
By the attainment of the heart's desire !

Moonrays that earlier afflicted me
With pain now bring me only keenest bliss.
Our union makes the harsh turn beautiful.
No pleasure of the world can equal this. (21)

Urvashi. I was not guilty of that long delay.

King. No, dear lady, what you say is true:

Happiness that follows on distress
Is greater far than gladness lightly won,
As shade beneath a noble tree is best
To one just scorched by summer's blazing sun. (22)

Manavaka. Now that the blessed moonrays have been worshipped,

Time has come for us to enter the house.

King. Well then, usher us into our palace !

Manavaka. My lady, you may walk along this path.

King. Lovely girl, now I wish one thing only.

Urvashi. Tell me, your Majesty what this may be.

King. **Once in the dark, while passing sleepless hours,**
One night appeared to be a hundred nights;
Now if one seems as long while joined with you,
How great the joy that heightens our delights ! (23)

(Exeunt.)

Act Four

(*Enter Chitralekha, troubled in spirit, and Sahajanya.*)

Sahajanya. Friend, your spirit is troubled, for your face
Is like a fading lotus. You are much distressed.
Tell me your grief and let me share it with you !

Chitralekha. Dear, though I am here engaged in worshipping
The mightiest of all deities, the Sun,
A task which this turn of the zodiac
Enforces on me, I am very anxious
Concerning the welfare of my friend, Urvashi.

Sahajanya. I know your sisterly love.—Well, what of this ?

Chitralekha. So, anxious as I am to learn the truth,
I stood in meditation and perceived
The essential cause of our calamity.

Sahajanya. I am anxious, too. What was the cause ?

Chitralekha. Urvashi went for play into the forest
Called Gandhamadana, taking the royal sage
As her companion, for on her behalf
He had left his kingdom to his ministers.

Sahajanya. Oh, how unfortunate ! Tyrannous love
Is inconsiderate. But what of this ?

Chitralekha. Then, disregarding her sage lord's advice
And infatuated by the prohibition
That her preceptor gave her, she invaded
Kumara forest, in whose fatal shades
All women are forbidden. After this
She was transformed into a vine and possibly
May be refashioned in some other form.

Sahajanya. Destiny may bring anything about.
Ah, that such love should meet with such a fall !
What does the king do now ?

Chitralekha. He spends long days
And nights in searching for her through the forest.
Besides, the seasonal clouds now threaten him
Which bring disasters to the most fortunate.

Sahajanya. But friend, such noble forms do not grieve long.
Some agent must emerge to rescue him
And bring about their ultimate reunion.—
So let us once again worship the Sun. (*Exeunt.*)

(*Enter the king, resembling a madman.*)

King. **Stop, demon, stop ! Where have you borne my love ?**
Ah, he has vanished in dark clouds before
The towering mountain and showers arrows on me !

(*closely observing*) All I can see are thunderclouds that pour
Lightning about Urvashi like bright gold !

(*thinking*) **Where is the white-thighed woman I adore ? (1)**
May she, by her power, be hidden through anger ?
But such a soul cannot be angry long.
May be she has ascended into heaven ?
But yet her love for me was always strong.
No enemy of the gods could force her from me.
I cannot see her, and I must bear this wrong. (2)

On wretches on whom fate has turned his back
One calamity succeeds another.

Just before the unbearable separation
From my newly-wedded love harassed
My soul, light clouds in kindly heaven arose
When summer's fierce intensity had passed. (3)

But why do I succumb to such distress
Of mind ? Do not the sages all declare
The king is king of heaven ? Then why not check
This monsoon ? But not so, for do not all
Wise men call clouds my high insignia ?

Clouds, with their streaks of lightning, shine as gold
To form my glorious, royal panoply.
My banners are the blossoms waved from trees;
The peacocks, perching on their canopy,
Crying more gaily with the lessening heat,
Are bards who sing my praises; mountain streams
Pour their wealth of water at my feet. (4)

Well, why this eulogium of my estate ?
I would rather find Urvashi in this forest.

(*looking about*) Ha ! I spy some evidence for hope :

This plantain tree, profuse with red-streaked flowers,
With cups conserving rain, to me appears
Symbolic of her eyes red-shot with anger,
Watered with profusion of her tears. (5)

How in this vast forest can I know
Whether she went along this path or that ?

If the firm heels of my lovely one
Had touched the damp earth, then would here be found
Prints of her coral feet, deep with the pressure
Of those large hips upon the fortunate ground. (6)

Ha ! this fragment shows her angry way :

See this green fragment of her vest, the color
Of a parrot's breast, covering the deep naval, torn
By thorn-decked branches of a forest tree,
Red-spotted, moist with tears from rage and scorn. (7)

(*looking more closely*) What is this ? This is only fresh green sward
With the red insect, irdragopa, on it.
Where in this inhospitable forest
Can I hear some rumor of my love ?

Ah ! there is the peacock with his wind-blown crest,
Precursor of heavy rains about to fall,
Perched on a rock moistened by gentle showers,
Lifting his sapphire neck, about to call. (8)

I must certainly inquire of him.

Dark-necked bird, with eyelids edged by white,
Ranging in this forest, have you spied
My long-necked love, as lovely as you are,
With luminous eyes and eyelids opening wide? (9)

Look, he dances at the approaching storm
But this is not the main cause of his joy:

His braid of feathers, dishevelled by the wind,
Urvashi gone, shines peerless in our sight;
But how could that bright braid of feathers vie
With my love's hair, loosened by our delight? (10)

Well, I will leave him and not speak with one
Who gladdens at another's misery.
Here is the cuckoo perching in the plum tree,
Inflamed by love as the hot season ends.
He is the wisest bird and I must ask him:

Lovers declare you bear their messages
And speak love's language most persuasively.
Will you, in kindness, lead me to my love
Or better, bring her willingly to me? (11)

What's this I hear? You ask me how my love
Should leave one who is so devoted to her?
Then I shall tell you what our story is:

She harbored anger toward me without cause;
No one on earth could know the cause thereof!
The tyranny of women over lovers
Does not depend on negligence in love. (12)

This heartless cuckoo cuts my story short
By turning to some business of her own.

Yes, it is true that men in happiness
Smile at others caught in misery's grip.
Intoxicated by these luscious plums,
She feasts on them as on a lover's lip. (13)

However, I shall not rebuke this cuckoo
Since her soft voice reminds me of Urvashi.
Well, I must hunt her further. (*He walks about.*) What is this?
Surely, I hear the chiming of her anklets !

No, this is not the tinkling of her jewels,
Only the crooning of the royal swans
Who, seeing the dark rainclouds gathering,
Prepare to fly to Himalayan lawns. (14)

But since these great birds, gathering on the lake,
Have not as yet commenced their long migration,
I shall inquire of them about my wife.
Ho ! Monarch of all flocks that breast the stream:

Fly to your mountains later ! Do not pluck
Lotus fibres fit to deck my throne.
First pluck out my sorrow for my love.
Great souls place grief of others before their own. (15)

Raising her head to heaven, she seems to say:
'Dreaming of mountains, I did not note your love.'

But, swan, if you did not observe my love
Walk by the lake where white birds congregate,
Then pray tell me how you could so well
Imitate her haughty, amorous gait? (16)

Therefore I present you my petition:

Swan, restore my loved one, since the law
Declares that all goods stolen and not earned,
Though only in part detected in the theft,
Shall in their totality be returned. (17)

(*laughing*) The swan has flown away, knowing I am
A monarch competent to punish thieves. (*Walks about.*)
Here is the wild-duck with his mate. I'll ask him:

Men find your motions like a wheel and I,
A charioteer, hold ardently in view
Those other orbs, my loved one's spacious hips;
Therefore I kindly ask of her from you. (18)

Ha, how absurd ! He asks me who I am,
As though he did not know me. Listen, then:

I am offspring of the Sun and Moon,
My parentage engraved upon the sky,
But best of all, Urvashi designated
Me as her husband. Such a one am I ! (19)

What, is he silent? Then I must reason with him:

When you are separated from your mate
By a mere lotus leaf, you raise your cry,
Fearing she may be far. Then what of me,
Begging for my wife, receiving no reply? (20)

Fate is massed against me. I shall go
Elsewhere.—But no ! I glimpse another hope:

Here in this lotus the six-footed bee
Is buzzing and, murmuring loudly, bars my path.
The lotus seems her mouth; the hiss, her cry
That after I bit her lip she raised in wrath. (21)

I shall salute this honey-gatherer,
This lotus-lover, who so resembles me:

O gatherer of honey, can you give me
News of her? (*looking closely*) **But this is past your power.**

If you had tasted her delicious breath
You could not be enamored by a flower. (22)

(*Walks about.*)

I must plunge deeper in this perilous wood.
Here is the king of elephants with his mate,
His great trunk resting on a nipa tree.
I may get word of my beloved from him. (*observing*)
But let me not be hasty to inquire !

First he must taste a fresh sallaki bough
Which, finding sweet, he offers to his mate,
Holding before her in his giant trunk
The fragrant burden of its honeyed freight. (23)

Ah, now her meal is done, I shall address him:

Lord of the herd, you must have seen afar
My moonlike love, fresh jasmines in her hair,
The essence of all youthful delicacy,
The essence of all beautiful and fair ! (24)

(*joyfully*) His deep, mild roar refreshes me and makes me
Seem nearer to my wife, for he and I
Have countless intimate resemblances:

I am styled lord of all the kings on earth
And you, the monarch of this mighty herd.
You rut unchecked as I, and, as the bees,
Swarming in multitudinous numbers, gird
Your head, so beggars clamor for my alms.
Urvashi, gem of women, is my wife,
And you have your dear mate. We are alike
In all but this: you have your mate for life ! (25)

Well, may you have her long, though separation
Becomes for me an everlasting fate.
(*Looks about.*) Here is the Mountain of the Sacred Glens,
Long the resort of sylvan deities.
Perhaps she is among them? I shall see. (*Walks about.*)
The whole sky darkens in token of my sins.
However, I shall ask these precipices:

Majestic mountain, has a delicate woman,
Small space between the breasts, dear to each sense,
With round hips, sheltered in your darkening forest,
Where love has made his godlike residence ? (26)

What ! no reply ! Being remote, he fails
To hear me. I will step nearer and call again:

Lord of all mountains, rising to the skies,
Have you seen the queen of womanhood,
Exquisitely fashioned in all her lovely parts,
Take shelter in your dark and savage wood ? (27)

(*hearing with joy*) What do you say? You saw her? Then for this

May you hear something dearer to yourself!
Where is this darling I described to you?

Echo. **Lord of all mountains, rising to the skies,**
Have you seen the queen of womanhood,
Exquisitely fashioned in all her lovely parts,
Take shelter in your dark and savage wood? (28)

King. Ah, this is only the echo of my voice
Rolling through your dark and rocky glens!—
I am weary and shall rest beside this torrent
Pouring down precipitous mountain walls,
Wafting coolness from its wild cascades.
I am strangely quieted by its crystal fury.

This is my unforgiving love transformed
By reason of her brooding upon my crime;
The rapids, her angry brow; the frightened birds
Are pendant jewels, jangling out of chime;
The flashing waters are her loosened robes
I may not clasp, even to the end of time. (29)

Well, I shall address her with this earnest prayer:

What fault could you discern in me, my love,
Whose every thought was dedicate to you?
How, proud lady, could you ever think
That such a slave as I could prove untrue? (30)

Ah, I have spoken vainly, for the stream
Is only a stream that I mistook for her.
Urvashi surely would not turn from me
And flow into the ocean. I will go
To the place I saw her last. (*walking about*) What's this? I see
A trace of her before me on this path.

Here is the red kadamba tree in flower,
Indicating the heat of summer passed.
This was the ornament that graced the hair
Of my beloved when I saw her last. (31)

But this is useless now and I perceive
A deer, who may have knowledge of my wife.

Hear me, spotted stag, like a shy glance
Cast at the forest's rich luxuriance ! (32)

He averts his gaze, as if he scorned my suit.

His doe, on drawing near him, seeing her fawn,
Suckles it, while the stag has turned his face,
Wholly concentrated upon her,
Remarking her fidelity and grace. (33)

Lord of the herd, hear my one inquiry !

Have you seen my loved one in this wood?
I would not have my darling come to harm.
I shall describe her to you in few works;
She is large-eyed, like your doe, with equal charm. (34)

But he neglects my words, eying his doe.—
This is the way of nature, for misfortune
Is always to be shunned. So I shall go. .(*Walks away, observing as he goes.*)

What is the red gleam flashing from that rock ?

It cannot be a piece of flesh some lion
Has rent and cast away, leaving its stains,
Nor can it be a spark of lingering fire
Since all the wood has just been drenched with rains. (35)

(*looking about*) **Ah, it is a gem of sparkling red**
Resembling blooms of rare azalea spray
Plucked by a shaft of sunlight, as a hand
Might grasp it, glittering in its crimson ray ! (36)

It allures me. I will pick it up.—But no !

Why should I soil it with my constant tears,
Now that my beloved is not found ?
Although it might bedeck her jet-black hair,
With blossoms of the mandar bushes bound. (37)

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Take it in hand, my child, do take it up !

This is the jewel called the " Union, " drawn
From the red ointment of the mountain's child,
Which, if worn by lovers, brings about
Their union, peaceable and reconciled. (38)

King. Who commands me? (*looking about*) Probably some sage,
Some mountain-dweller, holy as its deer.
Venerable man, I bless you for your words
And follow them at once. Here is the Union ! (*Takes up the gem.*)

If you will help me to regain my wife,
Her of the slender waist, my zone of bliss,
You shall become my chief head-ornament,
As Shiva wears the crescent moon for his. (39)

(*walking and observing*) Why is it that this humble, barren creeper
Draws me, or is it proper that it charms me?

With its lean leaves bathed by the recent rain,
It looks like red lips washed by recent tears.
It appears like one without her ornaments,
Fallen upon lean and barren years,
Or like my loved one lying at my feet,
Pale from repentance, withered with anxious fears. (40)

I must press this creeper to my heart
Which so well imitates my absent love ! (*He clasps the creeper. Enter Urvashi.*)
My body is delighted with the touch
Of Urvashi, but this cannot be believed.

Whatever I fancy at first of my beloved
Turns out next moment to be otherwise,
So that I now will trust alone to touch
And slowly open my deluded eyes. (41)

Ah, it is she, it is truly my beloved !

Urvashi (*weeping*). Victory to the king, my noble husband !

King. **O dearest lady, slender through your grief**
At separation, pale as the dim moon,
Have I the fortune to regain you here
As one recovered from a heavy swoon? (42)

Urvashi. I have known your misery, my love,
Through celestial powers hidden from you.

King. I do not understand the meaning of
'Through celestial powers hidden from you.'

Urvashi. I shall expound it. But first, my lord, forgive
My error which has brought you so much pain !

King. Dear girl, I have no need to be implored.
The sight of you delights me, body and soul.—
Tell me how you survived apart from me?

Urvashi. Hear me, my lord. The ascetic god, Kumara,
Who vowed to live in endless celibacy,
Resided in the wood at Gandhamadana,
Making this law.

King. What law?

Urvashi. That any woman
Trespassing in it should become a shrub
And only be released from her long prison
By a gem torn from the foot of Gauri.
My mind was shaken by my preceptor's curse,
So I forgot god's law and your advice.
I entered the forbidden wood and then
Was turned at once to a vasanti creeper.

King. All is explained, or else this could not be:

How could my dear bear such a separation
Since you even thought that I went far away
When I fell sleeping at your blessed feet,
Fatigued by pleasure in our amorous play? (43)

Here is the means of union you described.
I plucked it at the voice of the great sage. (*Shows the gem.*)

Urvashi. Ah, this is the union ! And because of this
I came to be myself again when warmed
In the embraces of my noble lord. (*She places it on her head.*)

King. Stand there a moment, my enchanted girl !

Your face illumined by the lustre flowing
From rays out of the sacred jewel spun
Wears the beauty of a lotus reddened
By softened radiance of the morning sun. (44)

Urvashi. Long ago you left your capital.
Your loving subjects must be jealous of me.
Come, let us go there.

King. As your grace commands.

Urvashi. In what way will it please my lord to go?

King. **Carry me, aerial traveller,**
To my new residence on a fresh cloud,
Converting it to our sky-chariot
While lightning flashes and thunder calls aloud.
For our banner let the rainbow stream
Living colors, radiant and proud. (45)

(*Exeunt.*)

Manavaka (*entering*). The king at last has happily returned
From long diversion in the sacred forest
And rules his kingdom from his capital
To the delight of all his loyal subjects.
Only one blessing is denied him, this
Is that he is still without an heir.
Today, being a special festival,
The king with all his queens has bathed himself
At the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna.
At present he is in his dressing-chamber.
While his Majesty is being robed
I shall enjoy these ointments and fresh flowers.

Voice (*behind the curtain*). O what an unspeakable misfortune !
The jewel I was carrying in its casket
Resting on a precious silken cloth
Was snatched off by a vulture, thinking it
A piece of flesh. The jewel was the chief
Ornament in the diadem of the queen.

Manavaka (*listening*). What a misfortune! This was the crest gem
Named " Union, " which my friend cherished the most.
This very moment he is rushing here,
His robing incomplete, to learn the truth.
Of this calamity. I must advise him.

(*The king enters with his followers, all in confusion.*)

King. **Where is this robber with audacious wing,**
This impudent and fearless criminal,
Pilfering the most precious of my gems
Guarded in my royal citadel? (1)

Huntress. There he is, soaring through a cloudless sky,
The crimson gem suspended from his beak,
A dancer whirling in a wild design.

King. I see him clearly, just as you describe him:

The great bird, swirling rapidly in figures,
Inscribing crimson letters out of fire,
Issuing from the gem flung on its ribbon,
Circles, a flashing comet, higher and higher. (2)

What can be done?

Manavaka. Please show the thief no mercy!
The culprit must be punished.

King. You speak rightly.
Get me my royal bow, quick, fetch my bow! (*Exit an Attendant.*)
But, friend, the bird is nowhere to be seen.

Manavaka. The ravenous vulture vanished to the south.

King. Look there, where he has circled back again:

Waving the gem, the bird is like a tree
Blossoming in heaven with red azalea flowers,
Flashing in splendor in a vacant sky
Beyond the range of any arrow's powers. (3)

(*Enter the Attendant with the bow.*)

Attendant. My lord, here is the bow and arm-protector.

King. What is the use of such a weapon now?
The vulture soars beyond our arrow's mark.

The precious gem no more resembles blooms
Strewn across heaven but now resembles stars
Or rather, that red spark at brink of dawn,
That angry and cloud-haunted planet Mars. (4)

Chamberlain, inform my citizens
That by my order this thief must be tracked down
To the tree on which he lights at eventide
And there admistered due punishment.

Chamberlain. It shall be as your Majesty commands. (*Exit.*)

Manavaka. Sit down, my lord. Where could the robber go
To escape the reach of your all-powerful arm?

King (*sitting with Manavaka*).

This jewel is dear to me not as a stone:
I estimate its value far above
All other gems; the jewel "Union" won,
After my loss, my union with my love. (5)

Manavaka. Yes, my lord, I know that story well.

(*Enter the Chamberlain with the gem and an arrow.*)

Chamberlain. Victory to my lord! The gem is here!

Your anger darting through the heavens in form
Of this keen shaft has in an instant brought
Death to the bird and to your royal hands
The glorious crest-jewel that you sought. (6)

(*All look astonished.*)

Who shall receive this gem and wash it clean?

King. Huntress, cleanse the jewel with fire and place it
In safety!

Huntress. As your Majesty commands. (*Exit, with gem.*)

King. Chamberlain, do you know whose arrow this is?

Chamberlain. It seems to bear a name. With my old eyes
I cannot read it.

King. Bring the arrow here.

(*The king reads the arrow with joy.*)

Chamberlain. I shall go and tend to other duties. (*Exit.*)

Manavaka. What is it you are meditating now?

King. Listen to me and learn the archer's name. (*Reads.*)

This arrow belongs to master Ayus, archer
And destroyer of any noxious enemy,
Taught by the huntress in the sacred forest,
Son of Aila and offspring of Urvashi. (7)

Manavaka (*eagerly*). O joy, your lordship is now blest with a son!

King. Friend, how can this be so, for I have never
Been absent from Urvashi at any time
Except on ritual days of sacrifice,
Neither have I witnessed marks of pregnancy,
Much less the evidence of her delivery,
Yet I remember certain circumstances:

Only for a few days her nipples darkened,
The color of her face appeared subdued,
Pale as the tint of a lavali leaf,
And her eyes were overcome with lassitude. (8)

Manavaka. Do not suppose all human circumstances
Also apply to beings who are divine.
Their ways and actions are inscrutable.

King. It may be as you say. But why should she
Conceal from us the presence of a son?

Manavaka. Who can fathom the celestial mind?

Chamberlain (*entering*). Victory to the king! A saintly woman comes
Bearing in hand a child, whom she has brought
From the forest-hermitage of Chyavana
To ask an audience with your Majesty.

(*Exit and re-enters with the prince, carrying a bow, and Satyavati.*)

Chamberlain. This is the way, my lady, this is the way. (*All walk about.*)

Manavaka (*observing*). Surely, this is that majestic prince
Whose name is carved upon the crimson shaft
That pierced the vulture! Further, I perceive
That he resembles you in every way.

King. So it would seem and probably it is:

My eyes that fasten on him flood with tears;
My heart beats wildly, my soul feels ecstasy;
All my body trembles and loses strength;
I yearn to clasp him to me passionately. (9)

Chamberlain. Mother, take your place before the king.

King. Mother, I bow to you in all reverence.

Satyavati. Blest one, may you prolong the lunar race !
(*aside*) The king has learned, without a prompting word,
Devotion of a father to his son.
(*aloud*) Pay your father reverence, my child !

(*The prince folds his hands and bows.*)

King. Long life to you ! Dear child, long life be yours !

Prince (*aside*).

If the mere knowledge that he is my father
Gives me such overwhelming thoughts as these,
What endearments must those parents feel
With children brought up on their very knees? (10)

King. Reverend lady, what has brought you here?

Satyavati. Hear me, your Majesty. This young child, Ayus,
Was for some cause confided to my care
By Urvashi immediately on his birth.
Birth rites and other ceremonies fitting
A child of martial race were all performed
By the pious Chyavana. Having mastered
Secular learning, he was trained in arms.

King. He was most fortunate in his preceptor.

Satyavati. Today he went forth with some hermit boys
To bring in flowers and fuel for the fires,
But violated our ascetic rules.

Manavaka (*earnestly*). How could such a youth of promise do so?

Satyavati. He shot a vulture roosting on a treetop,
That seemed to bear meat dangling from its beak.

King. What then?

Satyavati. When good Chyavana
Heard this, he ordered me at once to give
My pledge and trust, prince Ayus, back again.
Therefore I wish to see the queen Urvashi.

King. Pious lady, please to grace this seat ! (*Satyavanti sits down.*)
Chamberlain, go and bring Urvashi here.

Chamberlain. I shall, as you command me. (*Exit.*)

King. Child, come here !

They say the touch of a son's body thrills
The body of his father through and through,
Much as the moonstone melts in the moonbeams.
So let me press my body close to you. (11)

Satyavati. Gladden your father, boy, with your embrace !

(*The prince approaches the king with reverence; the the king embraces him and sits him on a footstool.*)

King. Now salute your father's friend, this Brahman,
And have no fear.

Manavaka. Why should the boy be frightened?
He has seen monkeys in the hermitage.

Prince (*smiling*).. I salute you, uncle !

Manavaka. Hail to you !

(*Enter Urvashi and Chamberlain.*)

Chamberlain. This is the way, my lady, this is the way.

Urvashi. Who is this seated on the footstool bearing
A bow in hand, whose crest is being tied
By his Majesty, my lord, himself? (*seeing Satyavati.*)
Ah, dame Satyavati is also here.
Then this is my son Ayus, now grown tall !

King. **Here comes the queen, your mother, who nursed you first**
And from whose breast love's milk again has burst. (12)

Satyavati. Come here, my princely child, and greet your mother!
Bow before her ! (*He does so.*)

Urvashi (*to Satyavati*). Mother, I salute you.

Satyavati. Girl, may you always hold your husband's love !

Prince. Mother, I bow before you.

Urvashi (*embracing the prince*). Child, be always
Dear to your father's heart. (*Goes toward the king.*) Victory
to the king !

King. Welcome to the mother of my son !—Be seated. (*All sit down.*)

Satyavati. Ayus has been taught all types of learning
And now is capable of bearing arms.
The pledge is now returned before your husband
And I would be dismissed, my duties done.

Urvashi. I would dearly keep you with me now
After these long, eventful years have passed,
But I must not detain you. It were unjust
To keep you from your pious hermitage.
You may go, my lady, till we meet again.

King. Mother, present my greeting to Chyavana!

Satyavati. Yes, I shall do so.

Prince. Mother, if you're really going
Back to the hermitage, please take me with you !

King. Child, you have lived the first stage of your life;
Now it is fit for you to live the second.

Satyavati. Obey your father, boy.

Prince. Then if I must,

Send me my pet peacock, Jewel-Crest,
Whose tail has flourished, who loves to scratch his head,
Who is the plaything that I love the best
And who sleeps patiently upon my bed. (13)

Satyavati (*smiling*). That I will do. And blessings on you all !
(*Exit.*)

King. My blessed one, my true and loving queen:
With this son now I have become like Indra
Blessed by Paulomi with his son, Jayanta. (14)

(*Urvashi remembers and weeps.*)

Manavaka. Oh look, my lord, your lady is in tears !

King. **Why do you suddenly shed tears, my dear,**
Which fall like pearls over your portly breast,
When at the acquisition of an heir
My joy is too extreme to be expressed? (15)

(*He wipes away her tears.*)

Urvashi. My lord, the ravishing sight of my own son
Had robbed my mind of my own destiny.
Only the name of Indra brought me back
To the realities of my condition.

King. Tell me what condition?

Urvashi. When my heart was lost
To you, I received orders from great Indra.

King. What were they?

Urvashi. They were these, my noble husband:
'When first the royal sage may see the face
Of the young son you bear him, then come back
To heaven again.' So, fearing separation
From your lordship, I in secret left the child
With Satyavanti in the hermitage
Over which sage Chyavana rules,
On pretext of being educated by him.
The sage has now returned him, since he sees
The child well grown and pleasing to his father. (*All grieve.*)

King. Ah, the obstructions fate presents to joy !

I was scarcely favored with a son
When, slender-waisted girl, I am a tree
In one hour favored with a gentle shower
And burnt by lightning irretrievably. (16)

Manavaka. Good fortune has brought evil in its train.
Now I suppose your Majesty will be
A hermit in the forest, dressed in bark.

Urvashi. Also, I fear the king will now consider
That since my son is trained and here returned,
I, a traitor, will take my way to heaven,
Having accomplished all that I desired.

King. No, no ! I could not dream so low a thought.

Dependence robs us of our liberty.
You must return where Indra reigns alone,
While I shall go to the beast-haunted forests,
Having placed your offspring on my throne. (17)

Prince. A father is not justified in yoking
A son to tasks borne by the best of men.

King. You are unwise in what you say, my boy:

The ichorous elephant, though young, subdues
The herd; the infant cobra's sting appears
Deadliest of all; and royal power is born
In regal blood not magnified by years. (18)

Chamberlain, tell the ministers in council
To move at once for Ayus' coronation !

Chamberlain. I shall obey your Majesty's command. (*Exit, grieving.*)

(*Suddenly all appear dazzled.*)

King (*looking up at the sky*). Ah, lightning flashes in a cloudless sky !

Urvashi. Ah, I know him well, the god Narada !

King. So this is his divinity, Narada:

His hair is matted like polished streaks of ochre,
His sacred thread is like the moon in whiteness,
He appears the golden Tree of Heaven flashing
With garlands of pearl, inestimable in brightness. (19)

Bring the guest-offerings to honor him ! (*Attendants do so.*)

Narada (*entering*). May the guardian of the Middle-World be glorious !

King. (*Takes the sacrifice from Urvashi and presents it.*)
Reverend Lord of Heaven, I salute you !

Urvashi. I bow to you in humble reverence.

Narada. May wife and husband never be divided !

King (*aside*). Can this be so? (*aloud*) Prince, bow to this God !

Prince. Ayus, Urvashi's son, pays homage to you.

Narada. Long life to you !

King. Favor us to be seated.

Narada. Listen, king, to Indra's high commands.

King. I am all attention to you.

Narada. **Sages, who know all things, have predicted**
For gods and demons a new age of strife.
Therefore resume your martial arms with us,
But keep Urvashi as your mate for life. (20)

Urvashi. A dart has been extracted from my bosom.

King. I bow to the great God.

Narada. And this is right.

Indra shall pay you well for your assent;
Fire is sustained in the sun's element. (21)

(*looking towards the sky.*)

Rambha, bring us the investiture
From Indra, honoring Ayus' coronation.

(*Enter Apsarasas with ceremonial objects.*)

Apsarasas. Lord, these are objects for the coronation.

Narada. Place the prince on his auspicious throne.

Rambha. Come here, my child.

Narada (*anointing the prince's head*). Complete the ritual !

Rambha. Child, salute your parents and the God ! (*The prince does so.*)

Narada. Blessings on you for long, joyful years !

King. Sustain the honors of our lineage !

Urvashi. And give your father joy !

(*Two bards are heard behind the curtain.*)

First Bard. Victory to the prince !

As Brahma was the first, Atri the second,
Budha the third, all spirits and divine,
You, Pururavas, fourth, your child the fifth,
So flourish in your high dynastic line ! (22)

Second Bard.

The splendor of your father shall be yours,
And you a fortress of integrity,
Where Ganga's holy waters flow between
The snow-clad mountains and the boundless sea. (23)

Apsarasas (*to Urvashi*). Fortune has blessed you in this glorious prince
And this inseparable marriage with the king.

Urvashi. God's fortune is dealt out between us all.
(*taking the prince's hand*) Come, child, and pay your homage to Queen Ausinari.

Narada. Stay here and go to her all in due time.

This coronation makes me think of Indra
Handing his army to king Mahasena. (24)

King. He must deserve these favors, being so favored !

Narada. What is there further I can do for you?

King. **May wealth and learning, which are seldom found**
Inhabitants of the same neighborhood,
Be in this house united to the end
Of interminable prosperity for the good ! (25)

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

RAMA'S LATER HISTORY
(Uttararamacharita)

by

Bhavabhuti

Rendered into English
with versification

by

Henry W. Wells

The noble knot of marriage is fashioned of
The warmth whereby we give our children love.
Uttar. III, 18

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

Rama, king of Ayodhya

Kusa, his elder son

Lava, his younger son

Lakshmaṇa, his brother

Chandraketu, son of Lakshmana

Valmiki, a holy sage, author of the *Ramayana*, and preceptor of Kusa and Lava

Janaka, father of Sita, formerly king of Mithila, now leading an ascetic life

Sambuka, an ascetic, appearing in his spiritual character

Ashtavakra, an ascetic

Sumantra, charioteer of Chandraketu

Durmukha, emissary employed by Rama

Saudhataki, pupil of Valmiki

Dandayana, pupil of Valmiki

A Vidyadhara, male spirit of air

Sita, wife of Rama

Arundhati, wife of the sage Vasishtha and guardian of Sita

Atreyi, a female ascetic

Kausalya, mother of Rama

Vasanti, guardian spirit of the forest of Janasthana

Tamasa, a river goddess

Murala, a river goddess

A Vidyadhari, female spirit of air

Prithivi, goddess of the Earth

Ganga (Bhagirathi), goddess of the Ganges

RAMA'S LATER HISTORY
(Uttararamacharita)

Act One

The Picture Gallery

Benediction.

We bow in reverence to former poets;
Then, for attainment of our blessed goal,
Beg aid of the immortal Goddess Speech,
High aspect of the Universal Soul. (1)

Stage-Manager. Stop! Why are your prayers so long? Since today is the festival of the adored Lord Kalapriya, I have a message for this distinguished audience. You, gentlemen, will be pleased to know that there is a descendent of the saint Kasyapa, called by the epithet of 'the eloquent throated', but better known as Bhavabhuti.

The Goddess Speech has followed this brahman
As a man followed by his loyal wife.
She it is who fashions for our drama
This narrative of holy Rama's life. (2)

Now, for the direction of his play, I shall appear as a citizen of Ayodhya, living in the times of Rama. (*looking around him*) Why, gentlemen, this is the very period of Rama's coronation. He has just overpowered Ravana's dynasty like a destroying comet. Still, I am perplexed. Festival music should celebrate this event day and night but I can hear no poets singing in the public squares. Why is this?

Actor (*entering*). Why, because his Majesty has sent back to their homes the noble demons, the monkeys and other allies in his battles at Lanka, along with all the priests and courtly sages who administer the different destricts and who came to honour our festivities. And now

Besides the queens, whom Sita's guardians lead,
Arundhati and her lord, the sage
Vasishtha, Rama's guardian, with his mothers,
Visit their son-in-law in pilgrimage. (3)

Stage-Manager. Yes, that must be the explanation.

Actor. But since I am a stranger here, may I ask who is this son-in-law?

Stage-Manager. **King Dasaratha had a daughter, Santa,**
Whom in his royal wisdom he bestowed
For adoption on king Romapada; both
Now go to sacrifice at his abode. (4)

The son of Vibhandaka, Rishyasringa, married her. The husband has inaugurated a sacrifice to last for twelve years. This explains why he has left here behind him his daughter-in-law, Sita, despite her advanced state of pregnancy, while all the elders have gone away to observe the sacrifice. But that is not our affair. We shall go to the royal gateway and perform the duties of our caste.

Actor. If that is what we should do, we must use the most becoming form of salutation to the king.

Manager. Actor,

We should indeed be careful, though no man
Can ever hope to stand beyond the reach
Of scandal; men are wicked and malicious
Toward chastity of women and of speech. (5)

You would better have said, extremely wicked and malicious,

For men speak evil even of queen Sita
Through the vicious stigma she received
When captive of the demon Ravana.
Even her fire-ordeal is not believed! (6)

Manager. It would be a tragic misfortune if the king should hear this scandal.

Actor. Still, the sages and the gods will bring all to a good ending. (*walking around*) Ah, friends! Where is his Majesty now? (*listening*) The people are gossiping about these affairs.

Janaka, Sita's father, who came hither
In honor of king Rama, has gone home.
This leaves Sita sad; and therefore Rama
Leaves his throne-room to dispel her gloom. (7)

(*Both go out.*)

(*Enter Rama and Sita.*)

Rama. Take comfort, take comfort, my queen! Under ordinary conditions our elders would not have left us.

But true performance of the sacred rites
Curbs men's freedom and restrains desires.
Domestic rituals erect obstructions
For all who kindle the religious fires. (8)

Sita. I know it, my lord, I know it! Yet separation from one's family is agonizing.

Rama. Yes, that is true. These misfortunes in the world do indeed gnaw at my heart. On account of just such evils, wise men and sages turn from the world in disgust to find peace in forest hermitages.

Chamberlain (*entering*). Dear Rama! (*with embarrassment, correcting himself*) I should have said, your Majesty!

Rama (*smiling*). No. Certainly 'dear Rama' is a fitting address for any one who has been a servant to my father. Address me as you usually do.

Chamberlain. Ashtavakra has just come from Rishyasringa's hermitage.

Sita. Then why is there a delay in our seeing him?

Rama. Bring him in to us at once. (*Exit Chamberlain.*)

Ashtavakra (*entering*). My blessings to you both!

Rama. Venerable sir, I bow to you. Please sit here!

Sita. All honor to you! Are my family and the noble Santa well?

Rama. I hope that the noble Rishyasringa, my brother-in-law, is encountering no difficulties in his sacrifice. And what of Santa?

Sita. Does she ever speak of us?

Ashtavakra (*sitting down*). Yes, indeed. Queen, the revered Vasishtha, your family preceptor, sends you this message:

Your mother is the sacred goddess, Earth;
God and your sire, Janaka, seem as one.
Through marriage to king Rama, you are now
United with the offspring of the Sun.
The Sun is now your royal ancestor
And I, your spiritual counselor. (9)

What else can we wish for you, except to be the mother of heroes?

Rama. We are most favoured by this:

Words of good men follow nature's acts
But words of ancient sages become facts. (10)

Ashtavakra. Besides, the revered Arundhati, the queen-mothers and Santa have repeatedly given you this injunction, that you should promptly grant Sita whatever she may wish.

Rama. We certainly shall perform whatever she tells us that she wishes us to do.

Ashtavakra. Finally, Rishyasringa, her sister-in-law's husband, sends the queen this message: 'You were not brought here because of your advanced pregnancy. Also, dear Rama has been left behind to be a comfort to you. We shall soon see you with a son in your lap.'

Rama (*smiling with modesty and joy*). I hope what you say will prove true. But does not the revered Vasishtha have a command for me?

Ashtavakra. Listen:

We are detained here by the sacrifice.
You are youthful and your reign has just begun.
Make it your foremost aim to please your subjects.
Only thus can your highest fame be won. (11)

Rama. **Pity, love and pleasure are but toys**
That, should occasion come, I could revoke,
Feeling no pain. I could abandon Sita
In order to propitiate the folk. (12)

Sita. On this account my lord is the rightful leader of Raghu's race. (*noise behind the curtain*)

Rama. Ah! Who is outside? Ashtavakra may retire.

Ashtavakra (*rising and walking about*). See! Prince Lakshmana is here. (*Exit.*)

Lakshmana (*entering*). Victory, victory to my noble brother! You should know that the painter, in accordance with our instructions, has depicted scenes from your career as panels on the palace walls. Perhaps your queen will look at them?

Rama. My dear brother, how well you know how to divert the queen when she is despondent. Up to what point is my story told in the pictures?

Lakshmana. Up to the clearing of the queen by the fire-ordeal

Rama. Do not speak of that!

What need for purification can there be
For her whose birth lifts purity on high?
Fire and water are the only elements
That cleanse and which no others purify. (13)

Forgive me, queen, born from sacrifice to the gods! The disgrace that I did you will blight your entire life.

The cruel world derives its sanctions only
From an uncontaminated family root.—
I wronged you. The right place for a sweet flower
Is on the head, not trampled under foot. (14)

Sita. No matter, no matter, my dear lord! Come let us go to see the pictures of your adventures. (*They rise and walk about.*)

Lakshmana. Here are the paintings.

Sita (*observing*). Who are these figures hovering in a formation above my lord's head and appearing to praise him?

Lakshmana. These are the missiles of stupefaction which the venerable Krisasva passed on to the sage Visvamitra, who in his turn presented them to Rama at the time that he killed the fiend, Tataka.

Rama. My queen, worship these divine weapons.

Brahma and others faithful to the Vedas
Practised penance for a thousand years
Whereby those ancient sages saw as payment
For their fierce penitential flames these spears. (15)

Sita. Honor to them! Honor to them!

Rama. Now they will certainly serve your children.

Sita. I am blessed.

Lakshmana. Here is the episode at Mithila.

Sita. See how my lord is painted here! His muscular body is like a fresh dark-blue lotus; my father gazed at it in amazement; tufts of waving hair surround his face; he breaks Siva's bow with utter ease!

Lakshmana. Look, my lady, look at this:

Here is your father; near him Satananda,
The son of Gottama, the family priest
Of the Janaka clan, gathered to honor
Vasishtha's clan, the greatest and the least. (16)

Rama. This is well worth seeing:

What man can live who would not be delighted
When Raghu and Janaka families
Are bound in marriage, while wise Visvamitra
Gives and receives such high felicities? (17)

Sita. Here are all of you, with all four brothers prepared for the marriage ceremony, after the hair-clipping. Ah, I seem to be in that place itself and on the same occasion!

Rama. **It seems to me again the blessed hour**
When the Janaka priest placed in my palm
A hand with nuptial bracelets at the wrist,
Whence my glance rose along the graceful arm
Up to the flower-like face that, crowning all,
Made that time an incarnate festival. (18)

Lakshmana. Here is the queen again; here is the princess, Mandavi, and here the daughter-in-law, Srutakirti.

Sita. Dear brother, who is that woman?

Lakshmana (*smiling bashfully*). I understand. The queen unfortunately asks about my wife, Urmila. Well, we shall pass on to something else.—Here, my lady, look at something truly worth seeing. This is the redoubtable Parasurama.

Sita. How I shudder!

Rama. I salute you, great sage!

Lakshmana. Look, look, here is this sage whom my noble brother—

Rama (*interrupting impatiently*). Come, brother, there must be much more to see. Show us what comes next.

Sita (*looking at Rama with love and admiration*). How well your modesty becomes you!

Lakshmana. Here we see our arrival at our capital of Ayodhya.

Rama (*weeping*). I remember, I remember!

My honored father then was still alive;
I and my brothers then had just been wed;
Our mother-queens tended to all our needs;
Those days of care-free happiness are fled. (19)

And then, too, there was Sita:

Then Sita was half-child, her bead-like teeth
Gleaming, her bright hair waving at her face,
Limber in limb, soft as the moonlit air.
The queen-mothers held her in their close embrace. (20)

Lakshmana. Here is the nurse, Manthara.

Rama (*quickly moving to another picture*). Queen,

Here, look at this thick-limbed Ingudi tree
Under whose far-flung branches, sitting down,
The friendly king of the Nishadas met us,
Close to the walls of Sringbera town. (21)

Lakshmana (*smiling, aside*). So, I notice that my brother has skipped over the unhappy story of our second mother, Kaikeyi.

Sita. Ah, this shows us knotting our hair before going to the forest hermitage.

The holy vow the Ikshvaku kings observed
When old to seek a forest hermitage,
Leaving their cares and kingdom to their sons,
My lord has taken in his youthful age. (22)

Here is the divine Ganges with her peaceful and holy waters.

Rama. Goddess! I salute you, guardian deity of Raghu's race.

Here Bhagiratha brings the Ganges down
From heaven, restoring with her holy waves
His father's ancestors who by the wrath
Of fierce Kapila were burnt and cast in graves
Deep under earth, because those sages searched
Too diligently for the stolen horse—
Sagara's offering in sacrifice—
And dug into the earth without remorse.
This blessing noble Bhagiratha won
By countless years of penance which he spent
Heedless of suffering and thus obtained
Mercy, to our eternal wonderment. (23)

Mother Ganges, cherish kindly thoughts for your daughter-in-law, Sita, just as Arundhati does!

Lakshmana. Here is the banian-tree, named Syama, on the shore of the Kalindi river, beside the road to Chitrakuta, which the kindly sage, Bharadvaja, pointed out to us.

Sita. Do you remember this region, my lord?

Rama. **Here with your playful legs and arms long travel**
Made weak as lotus stalks, laid on my chest,
I shampooed them in a close embrace,
Winning for you longed-for sleep and rest. (24)

Lakshmana. Here the fiend Viradha blocks our entrance to the Vindhya forest.

Sita. Do not look at that! I prefer to see my lord here in the southern forest holding a palm-branch over me with his own hand as an umbrella to shield me from the sun.

Rama. **These are the cliffs where down precipitous flanks**
Of mountains turbulent streams in torrents pour,
Where hospitable hermits serving rice
Find shelter in the forests by the shore. (25)

Lakshmana. This is Mount Prasravana. Here are the thick woods casting their deep-blue shadows over the banks of the Godavari river. Here are ravines loud with waterfalls while shadows of drizzling rainclouds add to the glossy darkness.

Rama. **Dear lady, do you recollect the days**
We spent at ease upon that mountain-side,
While dear Lakshmana waited upon us
Strolling by Godavari's sparkling tide? (26)

Also,

There, cheek to cheek, whispering delicious nothings
At random, happy, soul and body blended,
We clasped each other in a firm embrace,
Heedless of time until the dark night ended. (27)

Lakshmana. Look, here is the demon Surpanakha in the inner region of the Panchavati forest.

Sita. Ah, my husband! This is the last time that we shall be together!

Rama. How absurd! to be afraid at the mere thought of separation! You are only looking at a picture.

Sita. It may be so; but a vile person is always a cause of misery.

Rama. This scene in the Janasthana forest is so real that it appears as though it were actually present.

Lakshmana.

There foul demons, using as disguise
The golden deer, led my loved lord astray,
Wounding me so that, though washed off by blood,
The agony has not yet passed away.
Misfortunes in the Janasthana woods
Leave to the present hour my brother cursed,
Despairing, pale, and even to this day
Cause stones themselves to weep and hearts to burst. (28)

Sita (*weeping, aside*). Ah, joy of Raghu's race, you were miserable for my sake!

Lakshmana (*looking at Rama*). What do we see now, my brother?

Tears streaming from the fountains of your eyes
Roll like a broken necklace on the ground.
Only the quivering of your nose and lips
Betrays a grief too deep for word or sound. (29)

Rama. My dear brother,

Grief's fire at separation from my love
Was such that vengeance might in time amend,
But fires of grief that now consume my heart
Rage without hope that they shall ever end. (30)

Sita. Ah, terrible anxiety again separates me from my lord!

Lakshmana (*aside*). Ah very well. Then I will turn to something else. (*aloud*) Here is the courageous Jatayu, king of vultures, as old as an eon. Here is the scene of his greatest bravery.

Sita. O father! You carried your fatherly love to its tragic end.

Rama. Ah, father! You were king of birds and the true heir of Kasyapa. When will your equal come again? Your sacrifice was a treasure of saintliness.

Lakshmana. This is the west part of the Janasthana forest, called 'the Region of Many Groves,' where the headless demon Danu prowls. This is Mount Rishyamuka, and here is the hermitage of the sage Matanga. Here is Sabara, a saintly woman of the Sramana clan, and here is the lily pool, Pampa.

Sita. Here, as I have heard, my lord wept aloud from the depths of his heart, losing all his courage.

Rama. **When through my tears I see this pictured lake**
I mark the trembling lotuses, once white,
Turned purple by the shadows from young geese
Murmuring with joy, desiring to alight. (31)

Lakshman. Here is the heroic Hanuman.

Sita. This must be the courageous Maruti, who blessed the world by lifting it from despair endured so long.

Rama. **This is indeed a picture where we see**
The valor of the Monkey King expressed,
Who granted Anjana, his mother, joy,
And through whom we and all the worlds are blessed. (32)

Sita. Dear brother, what name has this mountain, where the peacocks with their plumes fully spread are dancing on the flowering kadamba trees? My noble husband is depicted in the shadow of this tree, about to swoon and supported by my arms, when only his beauty and majesty remained.

Lakshmana.

This is that famous mountain, Malyavan,
Fragrant with tall kakubha trees in flower;
Upon its breast a fresh-blue cloud is resting,
Both glossy and dark, rich with a gentle shower.

Rama. **Do not say this, do not say this Lakshmana!**
Hearing you, I can endure no more!
Seeing and hearing both alike reconjure
Sita herself beside me as before!

Lakshmana. After this you may see the endless, wonderful deeds of my noble brother and the courageous Monkeys and Demons. But my noble sister is tired. Please rest for a while.

Sita. My lord, viewing these pictures has given me a great longing. It leads me to beg of you—

Rama. You should rather command me.

Sita. I wish that I might enjoy myself again in these serene and lovely woodlands. I long to bathe in the cool and purifying waters of the divine Ganges.

Rama. Dear Lakshmana!

Lakshmana. Here I am.

Rama. Our elders have just instructed us that all Sita's wishes should be promptly granted. So, my brother, prepare a carriage that runs smoothly and does not jolt.

Sita. And you, my lord, you are coming too, are you not?

Rama. Oh, you are hard-hearted! Why must you ask that?

Sita. Then I am satisfied.

Lakshmana. Well, then, I shall do what my brother orders. (*Exit.*)

Rama. Dearest, rest a while by this window.

Sita. Yes indeed. I am very tired. Drowsiness overpowers me.

Rama. If that is so, cling close to me. We shall go there together.

Throw your reviving arm about my neck!
On your tired forearm drops of moisture gleam
As if a necklace fashioned of moonstones
Were kissed by radiance of faint moonbeams. (34)

(*helping her to do this, joyfully*) Dearest, what does this mean?

Here it is impossible to determine
Whether what I feel be joy or grief,
Swoon or siumber; for at your lightest touch
Comes poison or numbness, repugnant to relief. (35)

Sita (*smiling*). It is your constant love. What else could it be?

Rama. **Your gentle words, girl with the lotus eyes,**
Rouse my withered heart again to bloom,
Ambrosia and nectar to my ears and mind,
Charming my senses, banishing all gloom. (36)

Sita. Come, you honeyed speaker! Why not go to rest? (*She looks about for a sleeping-place.*)

Rama. And what would you be looking for?

Ever since our marriage, here at home
Or in the forest, in girl or womanhood,
My arm has been your pillow and no other
Has brought the gift of sleep nor ever could. (37)

Sita (*on going to sleep*). It is just as you say, my lord, just as you say. (*Sleeps.*)

Rama. Why, she was speaking quietly to me and now she has fallen asleep on my chest! (*looking down at her*)

She is the prosperity of my house,
She is the ambrosial pencil to my eyes,
Merely this touch of hers upon my limbs
Is like the juice cool sandalwood supplies.
Her arm about my neck appears a string
Of precious pearls, pure and inviolable;
All about her would be prefect bliss—
But separation is intolerable. (38)

Doorkeeper (*entering*). My lord, he has come.

Rama. Well, who has come?

Doorkeeper. Your Majesty, your attendant, Durmukha.

Rama (*aside*). Oh, Durmukha, the guardian of the harem. I sent him to spy on the citizens and country people. (*aloud*) Lead him in. (*Exit Doorkeeper.*)

Durmukha (*entering, aside*). Ah, how can I tell the king the unbelievable public slandar against Queen Sita? This is the miserable duty of men like me.

Sita (*talking while asleep*). Ah, my kind husband! Where are you?

Rama. Oh, fear of separation which she felt when looking at the pictures must now be giving her fresh trouble and anxiety even in sleep. (*stroking her affectionately*)

The man is happy who can somehow find
That unique treasure, the identity,
Favorable under all conditions,
Of perfect happiness and misery,
Where the constant heart encounters solace
That age and fortune cannot lead astray,
Which ripens into firmest love and friendship
When time has carried all reserve away. (39)

Durmukha. Victory to your Majesty!

Rama. Tell me what you have discovered.

Durmukha. The citizens and country people praise you and say, 'King Rama makes us forget King Dasaratha.'

Rama. This is merely praise. Tell me about some fault that I can correct.

Durmukha (*weeping*). I hope your Majesty will hear me. (*Whispers in his ear.*)

Rama. Ah, his words fall like a thunderbolt. (*Faints.*)

Durmukha. Take heart, my lord, take heart!

Rama (*coming to himself*).

Shame on the stigma coming to a woman
From living among strangers! Sita's blight
Was rectified by magic but the venom
Lives with the vulgar like a mad dog's bite. (40)

What can I do now in my wretchedness? (*reflecting sadly*)
What can I possibly do?

Good kings have vowed to serve their country's wishes
And by that policy prohibit strife.
It was through such sanctions that my father
At first lost me and later lost his life. (41)

Only a few hours ago Vasishtha sent me his injunction on this very matter. Besides,

Should the exalted and most pure tradition
Maintained by all my kingly solar race,
Those best of men, be tarnished by my failure,
How everlasting would be my disgrace! (42)

Ah, queen sprung from sacrifice to the gods, who has purified the earth by being born from it, who has been a delight to the families of Janaka and Nimi, whose character even the god of fire and Vasishtha and Arundhati have approved, who has been life itself to me and my dear companion in the forest, dear to my father, speaking seldom and always in kindness, how can it be that with such a nature this should be the end?

Sita, through you the worlds alone are holy,
Yet the world speaks unholy words of you.
To all the worlds you are the one salvation,
Yet are that victim whom these worlds pursue. (43)

Durmukha, tell Lakshmana that your new king, Rama, orders this: (*whispering*)

Durmukha. But why has your Majesty merely on the words of wicked men determined to inflict such cruelty on your queen, whose purity has been attested by the fire-ordeal and who carries in her womb the continuance of the holy Raghu family?

Rama. Silence! Do you call the inhabitants of my city and my country wicked men?

The Ikhvaku race is loved by all its people
But wretched slandar vitiates its sway;
The fire-ordeal that absolved Queen Sita
Is disbelieved, happening so far away. (44)

So go as I commanded you!

Durmukha. Oh, poor queen!

Rama. Ah, the pity of it! I have myself become a wicked man, a savage.

I have served her every want from childhood;
On me her guardianship has been conferred,
And yet I hand her to the house of death
Just as a butcher kills a household bird. (45)

Since this is so, why should I, an untouchable and a criminal, continue to pollute the queen? (*Slowly raises Sita's head and withdraws his arm.*)

I am an outcast, vile, untouchable,
Yet in innocence you cling to me!
You lean as on a couch of sandalwood
But touch instead a deadly poisonous tree. (46)

(*rising*) Ah, this mortal world is now turned upside-down. There is no more purpose in my living. The earth is now a sterile, withered wood. The universe has lost all charms, my body become pure suffering. No help and no choice remains. What is there to do? Surely,

Dear mother, breath itself was given Rama
Only that he should suffer pain and smart.
Life to me is but an iron nail
Driven into the center of my heart. (47)

Ah, Arundhati, who has been a mother to me, venerable preceptors Vasishtha and Visvamitra, blessed Fire and Earth, sustainers of all things living, my father, Janaka, my mother,

my dearest friend, king Sugriva, kind Hanumant, Vibhishana, lord of Lanka and my greatest benefactor, and friend Trijata, who so well befriended Sita, you are all robbed and insulted by cursed Rama! But who am I to dare speak of them now?

Indeed I believe all noble-hearted men
Polluted merely uttering my name.
I am the most ungrateful of all wretches,
Whose perfidy exudes the stench of shame. (48)

It is true:

I have cast out one who upon my bosom
In fullest confidence has laid her head;
Her burdened womb is throbbing with our child;
Both by the forest beasts will soon be dead. (49)

(*putting his head on Sita's feet*) Queen, queen, for the last time Rama's head touches your lotus feet. (*Weeps.*)

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Help, help! an outrage has been done to a brahman!

Rama. Ho there, report what this means!

Voice. **Harassed by Lavana, the demon-fiend,**
A multitude of sages, religious men
Living beside the river Yamuna
Approach you, as their rightful guardian. (50)

Rama. What, are the demons harassing the hermits even yet! Then I shall at once send my brother Satrughna to destroy this demon Lavana. (*striding a few paces, then returning*) Ah, my queen, how can you exist in this unguarded state? Oh blessed and all-merciful Earth, protect Sita, your pure and innocent daughter!

Protect her, Earth, guardian of all good things,
Maintain your daughter, Sita, safe and sound,
Pride of the Raghu and Janaka clans,
Evoked by you from sacrificial ground! (51)

Sita (*speaking in sleep*). Ah, gently, my lord! (*suddenly arising*) Why, how foolish I am! Here I am deceived by an evil dream and crying after my lord! (*looking about*) What! Can it possibly be that my husband left me sleeping alone here and has really gone? What can this mean? Well, I shall be angry with him, if I am sufficiently mistress of myself when I next look into his face.—Who is in attendance there?

Durmukha (*entering*). Queen, prince Lakshmana sends his word that the carriage is ready and that your ladyship should get into it.

Sita. Here, I climb into it. (*pretending to climb*) My heavy womb throbs. So please go more slowly!

Durmukha. This way, this way, my queen!

Sita. Honor to those whose only wealth is their penance! Honor to the guardian deities of the Raghu race! Honor to the lotus-feet of my husband! Honor to all my elders! (*Exeunt omnes.*)

Act Two

Dandaka Revisited

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Welcome to her whose wealth is penance! (*Enter a female ascetic dressed as a traveller.*)

Female Ascetic. Look, here is the deity of the wood coming toward me with an offering of leaves, flowers and fruits.

Woodland Deity (*entering and strewing her offering about*).

Enjoy this forest at your own sweet will.
This is indeed a lucky day for me
Since meetings of good persons come about
Seldom and with too much difficulty.
Enjoy this grateful shade and simple meal
Which no severest penance could refuse;
Ripe fruits and luscious roots spring from our ground,
The water is pure and all is for your use. (1)

Female Ascetic.

What is further need hardly be said:
The spirit is also pure; a conduct full
Of warm love yet restrained governs your speech.
This shows a modest mind bent to do good,
Sociable, generous, within easy reach.
This only wins a lasting dispensation,
Since, being unvexed by waves of more or less,
It shows forever as in its beginning
Fragrant, smooth, triumphant gentleness. (2)

(*Both sit down.*)

Goddess. What is your name, my lady?

Female Ascetic. I am Atreyi.

Goddess. Honored Atreyi, where have you come from and why have you travelled to this remote Dandaka forest?

Atreyi. **Many sages live here who well know**
The Omkara lore, Atreyi as their chief.
Leaving the poet Valmiki's school, I came
For further study in Vedanta belief. (3)

Goddess. But if so many scholars come to study the brahmanic scriptures with the sage Valmiki, why, my lady, did you leave him to come here?

Atreyi. There has been a great impediment to study there. So I have gone on this long journey.

Goddess. What kind of impediment can there be?

Atreyi. Some unknown divinity brought to that revered sage two boys wonderful in every way and so very young that they seemed just to have been weaned. They charm the hearts not only of the sages but of all beings, animate and inanimate.

Goddess. Do people know their names?

Atreyi. The unknown deity is said to have declared their names to be Kusa and Lava and to have revealed their marvelous power.

Goddess. What kind of power?

Atreyi. It is said that they have possessed from birth the heavenly Jrimbhaka weapons and the secret spells that govern them.

Goddess. This is certainly marvelous!

Atreyi. The venerable Valmiki has cherished them and brought them up under his special care. After they had gone through the ceremony of tonsure, he instructed them in all branches of knowledge except the three Vedas. Then, after the eleventh year from conception, he invested them with the sacred cord and in keeping with the regimen prescribed for Kshatriyas the sage gave them their instruction in the three Vedas. It is unbecoming for scholars like myself to study in company with persons of such brilliant intellect and strong memory. For

The teacher teaches clever minds and dull
But neither takes the skill away nor gives.
He cannot make all uniformally bright.
By natural aptitude the spirit lives. (4)

Goddess: So this is the obstruction to your course of study?

Atreyi. And there is still another.

Goddess. What can that be?

Atreyi. One day the venerable Valmiki went to make his midday offering on the bank of the Tamasa river. There he saw one of a pair of herons pierced by a hunter's arrow. Then he was instantly inspired by the Goddess Speech to create the anushtubh metre:

Passion indeed is passion, peace is peace;
But never, forester, shall you attain
Eternal rest, since by your cruel shaft
One of the love-rapt heron pair was slain. (5)

Goddess. This invention of new metres unknown to the Vedas is truly wonderful!

Atreyi. Then at the same time the Lotus Born Author of all Creatures came to the venerable sage and said to him: 'You have been granted the revelation of Brahma-in-the-Form-of-Speech; so speak out the History of Rama; your prophetic eye of vision will never be clouded; you are the first poet!' Immediately on saying this, he became invisible. So the revered Valmiki composed for the first time the story called *Ramayana*, that manifestation of Brahma-in-the-Form-of-Word.

Goddess. Ah, so the world has been embellished!

Atreyi. And so, as I said, there have been great obstructions to our studies.

Goddess. Naturally.

Atreyi. I am rested now. So tell me, kind lady, the way to Agastya's hermitage.

Goddess. Enter the Panchavati forest from this side and then follow the nearer bank of the Godavari.

Atreyi (*weeping*). What! Is this penance grove Panchavati? Is this the Godavari river? And are you Vasanti, deity of the Janasthana?

Vasanti. All you say is true.

Atreyi. Ah, Sita, my child!

This is the grove of trees that once you loved;
We talk of you; all here exists the same;
The grove is real; Sita is but a word;
Your passing leaves us nothing but a name. (6)

Vasanti (*with alarm, aside*). What? 'leaves us nothing but a name,' you say! What misfortune could possibly have come to queen Sita?

Atreyi. Not only misfortune, but misfortune accompanied by scandal. (*Whispers in her ear.*)

Vasanti. Ah, what a cruel blow of fortune! (*Swoons.*)

Atreyi. Take comfort, good lady, take comfort!

Vasanti. Dear friend! Noblest lady! That it should come to this! Dear Rama, dear Rama—but I should rather say I have heard quite enough of you! Tell me, revered Atreyi, is there any word as to what became of queen Sita after Lakshmana left her and returned from the forest?

Atreyi. None at all.

Vasanti. Oh how wretched! How was this allowed to happen when Arundhati and Vasishtha were guardians for the sons of the Raghus and the queen-mothers were still alive?

Atreyi. The elders were then residing in Rishyasringa's hermitage. Now twelve years have passed. Rishyasringa has paid the elders all fitting honors and bid them farewell. Then the revered Arundhati said: 'I shall not return to Ayodhya if Sita, our daughter-in-law, is not there.' Rama's queen-mothers agreed to this also. So the illustrious Vasishtha gave the pious invitation that they all should go to Valmiki's penance grove and remain there.

Vasanti. And as for that king—what is he doing now?

Atreyi. The king has begun a horse-sacrifice.

Vasanti. Oh, shame! Has he married again?

Atreyi. No, heaven forbid!

Vasanti. Then what woman is to share in the religious sacrifice?

Atreyi. A golden image of Sita.

Vasanti. Ah, truly,

Ha! who can fathom minds whose excellence
Exceeds all ordinary human power,
When spirits are firm as firmest adament
Yet also softer than the softest flower? (7)

Atreyi. The horse chosen for the sacrifice has been set loose by Vamadeva. A guard has been assigned to the horse consisting of the number of soldiers prescribed by the scriptures. Lakshmana has appointed his son, Chandraketu, as their head. He has been initiated into the traditional knowledge of the Celestial Missiles and now leads a force complete with the four military divisions.

Vasanti (*with amazement and tears of affection*). So at least Prince Lakshmana has an heir and I, my dear mother, am alive to see this!

Atreyi. In the meanwhile a brahman cast down the body of his dead son at the door of the king's palace, beat his breast and cried out: 'An outrage has been committed against a brahman.' The compassionate Rama reflected that the fault was his, since no violent death could occur in the kingdom without the king himself being at fault. Then suddenly a voice was heard from the air:

A man of mixed degree, by name, Sambuka,
Lives in this sacred forest, free from strife.
His head must be cut off by you, dear Rama.
Slay him and bring the brahman back to life! (8)

When he heard this, the lord of the world drew his sword, ascended his winged chariot and commenced to move in all four quarters of the sky in search of the Sudra ascetic.

Vasanti. A smoke-inhaling ascetic named Sambuka is doing penance here in the Janasthana, so I hope that dear Rama will once more grace this forest.

Atreyi. My kind lady, may I leave you now?

Vasanti. Honored Atreyi, go as you wish. But remember that daylight draws to its close.

Trees on the banks of Godavari river
Honor its waves with inexhaustible blooms;
Languid stems are loosed by heat and further
By elephants whose trunks are living brooms.
Doves nest in leafy branches and peck deeper
And deeper in thick bark for insect swarms,
Amusing pious hermits by intoning
Through nature's throat their loved Vedantic psalms. (9)

(*They walk about and leave.*)

End of the Prologue

(*Enter Rama, seated in his chariot, the Pushpaka, his sword drawn and showing his feeling of compassion.*)

Rama. **Right hand, hurl your sword at the ascetic**
So that the brahman's son may live again!
You are a limb of Rama's body, therefore
You can possess no sympathy with pain,
For you have banished Sita to the wood
When burdened with her weight of motherhood. (10)

(*striking reluctantly*) An action is done worthy of Rama!

A Celestial Person (*entering*). Victory, victory to your Majesty!

You with your sword in hand have freed that boy
From Yama, Lord of Death, but the elation
Is mine, dying for him. I am Sambuka.—
Knowing good men lifts dead men to salvation! (11)

Rama. Both these events please us. Enjoy the rewards of your terrible penance.

May you win those bright and blissful worlds
Entered only through rebirth in merit.
These are the realms of light men call Vairaja,
Which souls in ecstasy alone inherit. (12)

Sambuka. All this reward comes only through you. Penance is useless here. Or I should say rather that I am indebted to you through my penance.

You are the one we seek through all the worlds,
High Lord of Men, setting our spirits free.
Across a thousand leagues of vacant space
You come to a poor Sudra, even to me!
My penance brought this blessing, for what else
Could bring you from your palace at Ayodhya,
Rescuing me from my austere abode
Here in this savage forest of Dandaka? (13)

Rama. What! Is this really Dandaka. (*looking all about*)

Genial and intimate here, but over yonder
Vast, rugged, harsh, there looms a mountain wall.
Here shaded pools where grateful hermits bathe,
There thunders down a frantic waterfall.
This is indeed Dandaka that I see,
Sharpest reminder of my infamy. (14)

Sambuka. This is surely Dandaka. And I have heard that when your Majesty was living here before

Within this region by your mortal sword
Fourteen thousand fearsome demons fell,
Likewise the leaders of that devilish clan,
Dushana, Khara, Trimurdhan as well. (15)

On this account it has become possible for country people like myself to roam about safely in the Janasthana, as a friendly resort for ascetics, who need have no more fears.

Rama. This is not merely Dandaka but also Janasthana?

Sambuka. Certainly. Stretching southward beyond the skirts of the Janasthana are mountains with caverns infested by fierce and terrible monsters which fill all living things with horror.

These woods, in places silent and profound,
In others echoing ferocious roar
Of savage beasts; there terrible and huge
Serpents bask along the river's shore.
Even in repose their breathing fires the wood.
Where earth is parched, enormous pythons let
Little lizards swarming in their clefts
Of rugged hide drink up the evil sweat. (16)

Rama. **Yes, this is Janasthana. Once again**
I see it. Here I made the demons bow.
Just as if I did these deeds once more
They loom before my vision as of now. (17)

Princess Sita was exceedingly fond of groves and these are her woods. What can be more tragic than this?

'I will live with you in these fragrant woods.'—
Words neither time nor torment can destroy.—(18)
By doing nothing we drive grief away.
Love is an unutterable joy. (19)

Sambuka. Then turn away from these hideous woods! Hero, look at these severe and majestic forests adorning hills tinged with smooth tones like a peacock's throat, where dense thickets of young trees cast blue shadows, within whose shelter roam many herds of fearless deer! Look at these calm and awe-inspiring central woodlands!

Here birds, delirious with delight, invade
Blossoms of vanira vines that fall
Upon the cool and crystal waters,spreading
Fragrance, gloss and color over all.
Clusters of darkling jambu berries load
Streams so thickly that their languid song
Exudes a muffled murmur which the mountains
Echo as their rivulets purl along. (20)

Besides,

To this reverberate sullen growls of bears
Lurking in caverns; perfume spreads abroad
From pungent, cool sallaki trees strong tusks
Of rutting elephants have split and gored. (21)

Rama (*checking his tears*). Friend, may your road be happy!
May you vanish toward the celestial worlds!

Sambuka. I shall pay homage to the sage Agastya, the expounder of Brahma, before entering into the holy realms. (*Exit.*)

Rama. **This is the very forest where we passed**
Our days before fresh youth had turned to age,
Tasting all warm pleasures of young love
In all the peace of a quiet hermitage. (22)

These are the very mountains where the cries
Of amorous peacocks rang, where friendly calls
Of deer resounded; where cool, rustling trees
Murmured above sonorous waterfalls. (23)

This is where the mountain, Prasravana,
Lifts to dark clouds its everlasting snows,
Suspended half in earth and half in heaven,
Down which the river Godavari flows. (24)

Upon that noble crest the king of vultures
Possessed his eerie; at its foot we took
Our joy in leafy cottages half-hidden,
Sheltered by branches in a shaded nook. (25)

Here are places in the Panchavati forest where during our long residence we had all kinds of confidential intercourse and where the woodland goddess, Vasanti, lived, a dear friend of my love. Ah, what has happened to Rama now?

Now my poignant grief bursts forth anew
As some fierce poison broken out afresh,
An arrow splintered in an ancient wound,
The heart's grim ulcer gnawing at the flesh. (26)

Still, I must observe these scenes that were once so dear to me.

Where there was once a stream there now are sands,
Where forests stood now only rocks remain.
I almost think this is a different world.
Only vast mountains show it as the same. (27)

Ah, my affection for the Panchavati draws me to it more strongly as I am about to leave it. (*sadly*)

How can accursed Rama, who destroyed
His love, visit this wood or pass it by
Without saluting it, as he recalls
Dear words of hers to cherish till he die? (28)

Sambuka (*entering*). Victory to the king! My lord, when the sage, Agastya, heard from me that you were in the neighbourhood, he gave me this message for you. 'Now that we have performed the auspicious ceremonies for your descent from your celestial chariot, the affectionate Lopamudra and all the sages await you. So come, honor us with your visit! There will be time enough for you to return in the chariot; by then all will be prepared for the horse-sacrifice.

Rama. I shall do as the exalted sage commands.

Sambuka. Your Majesty may then turn your chariot in this direction.

Rama. Revered Panchavati, forgive Rama this brief transgression from duty because of my regard for the elders!

Sambuka. Look, look, my lord:

Here on Mount Kraunchavata half-fledged owls
Hoot from their nests, silencing coward crows.
Fightened peacocks cry as coiling snakes
Clamber where the sandal-thicket grows. (29)
Here down the Southern Mountain, with its crests
Blue in clouds encircling them as screens,
Waters of the Godavari rush
Raging and roaring through the dark ravines.

Here the holy confluence of streams
Clashes with fury of waves curled over and under,
Pouring down the pinnacles and peaks
To fathomless depths with crash and clang of thunder. (30)

(Exeunt both.)

Act Three

The Shadow

(*Enter two River Goddesses, Murala and Tamasa.*)

Tamasa. Dear Murala, you seem in haste. Why is this?

Murala. Honored Tamasa! Lopamudra, the wife of the sage Agastya, has sent me to say to the best of rivers, the Godavari: 'You know already what state Rama has been in since he abandoned Sita.

Since his abandonment of Sita, Rama
Has known in secret agonizing pains
Such as are seething waters that a vessel
Of iron over a livid fire sustains. (1)

So now Rama is wasting away with grief accumulated in the long period of sorrow in behalf of one so dearly loved. When I look at him in this climax of his trouble my heart trembles to its core. Besides, since he has returned here, he will certainly see the Panchavati woods where many places will speak to him of his affectionate confidences with his wife. Though Rama is by his nature heroically firm, serious dangers must arise from the deep-seated pains these scenes will evoke. So, venerable Godavari, take great care:

Whenever Rama sinks beneath his suffering,
Revive him, Godavari, with cool spray
And perfumes floating from your lotus filaments
Which on your breeze-stirred, rippling waters sway.' (2)

Tamasa. Such kindness is worthy of Lopamudra's love; but the natural cure for Rama's plight is at hand today.

Murala. What is that?

Tamasa. Listen! Possibly you have not heard that after Sita was abandoned in the neighbourhood of Valmiki's penance-grove and after Lakshmana returned to the palace, when her

travail came over her, Sita threw herself into the Ganges and there at that moment gave birth to two sons. She was comforted by the two goddesses, Prithivi, the mother Earth, and Bhagirathi, the river Ganges, who together transported her to the underworld. As soon as the twins were weaned, Bhagirathi presented them for their training to the great sage, Valmiki.

Murala (*astonished*).

Harsh fortune is itself miraculous
When noble spirits, as Sita and her lord,
Find the exalted gods of Earth and Ganges
Setting their fates again into accord. (3)

Tamasa. Now that Bhagirathi has heard from the river nymph Sarayu of Rama's visit to the Janasthana forest on his mission concerning Sambuka and of the fears that Lopamudra has for the king, Bhagirathi has come to the banks of the Godavari bringing Sita with her.

Murala. The affectionate Bhagirathi has had tragic apprehensions. She knows that when the king is in his capital and his mind engaged with the world's welfare, his thoughts can be distracted from his emotions; but now that he stands face to face with his sorrows, his visit to the Panchavati must be disastrous. But how can Sita be of comfort to him here?

Tamasa. The goddess Bhagirathi has told Sita. 'Child, you have sprung from sacrificial ground. Since today, as you know, is the twelfth birthday of Kusa and Lava, we must celebrate the tying of the auspicious knots about the boys' arms. So with flowers gathered by our own hands pay homage to the sun god, father of the Manu race. Through my powers not even the woodland deities will be able to see you when you are on earth, much less mortals.' I also received this command. 'Tamasa, our daughter-in-law, Sita, is already extremely fond of you. So you must now be her companion.' So you may see that I am only doing as the goddess has asked.

Murala. I for my part will report this to the revered Lopamudra. I believe that dear Rama has just arrived.

Tamasa. **Here, issuing from the well-springs of the river,**
Comes Sita, pale, weak through emaciation,
Her hair undone, the very soul of pathos,
Incarnate form of Grief-in-Separation. (4)

Murala. Here indeed she comes:

Fiery grief has crumpled her heart's flower,
Withering her body, as the delicate, sweet,
Immaculate bloom of the ketaki flower
Fades to its inmost petal in autumn's heat. (5)

(*They walk around and go out. End of the Prologue.*)

Voice (*behind the curtain*). O, how unfortunate, how unfortunate!

(*Sita enters, busy collecting flowers, listening with pathetic eagerness.*)

Sita. Ah, I think this is my dear friend, Vasanti, speaking.

Voice (*behind the curtain*).

Ah, that young elephant that Sita once
Fed with fresh leaves from the sallaki plant,
Who stood adoring her, eager to grasp
What the tender-loving hands would grant— (6 a-b)

Sita. What of him?

Voice. **Sporting in the water with his mate,**
Turns on an elephant, mighty of limb,
Who in the heat of wantonness and pride
Dares in rivalry to challenge him. (6 c-d)

Sita (*in confusion, advancing a few steps*). My lord, help, help my child! (*Reflecting, and in dejection*). Ah, how unfortunate I am! At sight of the Panchavati the old, familiar words came to my lips. I am so unhappy! Ah, my noble lord! (*Swoons.*)

Tamasa. (*entering*). Take heart, my child, look up!

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Stop, best of aerial chariots! Land here!

Sita (*recovering, with joy and trembling*). Ha! Where does this deep voice come from, reverberating like the roar of a dark raincloud, filling the hollows of my ears and suddenly reviving a desire for life even in a wretch like me?

Tamasa (*with tears and smiles*). O, my darling,

That sound is faint, weird and unfathomable,
Coming from far, we know not what nor where.
Why do you stand, then, like a pea-hen startled
At murmurs in a thunder-burdened air? (7)

Sita. Dear lady, did you say 'faint'? From the tones of the voice I recognize that it is my noble lord speaking.

Tamasa. Men say that the king of the Ikshvaku dynasty has come to the Janasthana wood to give chastisement to a Sudra ascetic.

Sita. I am happy to see that the king does not neglect his royal duties.

Voice. **When trees to me were living as the deer,**
My own beloved vital above them all,
All were companions of my happiness,
Mountain, cave, river and waterfall. (8)

Sita (*looking about*). Ah, here is my husband, pale, weak and shrunken as the moon in the sky of dawn, only recognizable by his grace and majesty.—Support me!

Tamasa. Take heart, my child, take heart!

Voice. In sight of the Panchavati

Gloom that now beset me is the smoke,
Black and impenetrable, from a fire
That in due course will burst its sooty pall
And to the farthest height of heaven aspire. (9)

Ah, my dearest Sita!

Tamasa (*aside*). This is just what the elders feared.

Sita (*recovering herself*). Ah, how is this?

Voice. Ah, queen, princess of Videha, my dear companion during my stay in the Dandaka forest! (*Swoons.*)

Sita. Ah, ah! after speaking to me, a miserable being, he has swooned, closing the deep-blue lotuses of his eyes. He has fallen helpless and breathless on the ground. Dear Tamasa, save him! Bring my husband back to life! (*falling at her feet*)

Tamasa. **Instead, dear Sita, it is only you**
Who can revive your lord to light and air.
Touch of your hand is perfect happiness.
The treasure and its secret all is there. (10)

Sita. As you say. I shall do as you command. (*Exit in haste.*)

(*Rama is now seen fallen on the ground;*
at Sita's touch he revives, with much joy.)

The lord of the three worlds has come back to life.

Rama. Ha! What is this?

Have I been anointed by some juice
Pressed from the sandlewood of paradise,
Or is it kneeded from the lunar rays,
This balm at which my sunken spirits rise? (11)

Surely, this is the old, familiar touch
That overcame my soul when half a boy.
Now, as it extinguishes my gloom,
It whelms me in a lassitude of joy. (12)

Sita (*withdrawing, in fear and excitement*). Even this much is a great deal to me now.

Rama (*sitting up*). Surely I cannot have been favored by my dear queen Sita?

Sita. Ah, will my husband search for me?

Rama. Well, I shall look about for her.

Sita. Dear Tamasa, we must leave. If the king sees me he will be still more angry for my approaching him without leave.

Tamasa. Child, by grace of the Ganges you are invisible even to the woodland deities.

Sita. Ah, it is so!

Rama. Dear Sita!

Sita (*sobbing with emotion*). My lord, this is not borne out by what has really happened. (*weeping*) But why should I be unmerciful to my lord, who in the kindness of his heart addresses an unhappy woman such as I and whose sight is impossible to obtain even in another world? I know his heart and he knows mine.

Rama. (*looking around in despair*). Ah, no one is here.

Sita. Honored Tamasa, when I see him in this condition, even though he threw me aside without cause, I cannot comprehend the state of my own heart.

Tamasa. I know it, child, I know it.

Numbed by despair, clouded by anger, ardent
For union, maddened by long separation,
At last all harsh conflicting passions melt
Through pity for your husband's desperation. (13)

Rama. Queen !

That cool, moist touch sets my pained soul aright,
But where are you, dear source of my delight? (14)

Sita. I have heard once again these words of my noble lord, proving the unfathomable depth of his love. They make life precious to me, even though my unjust banishment remains a rankling dart.

Rama. How could my dear wife possibly be here? My constant thought of her must have caused this illusion.

Voice (*behind the curtain*).

Ah, that young elephant that Sita once
Fed with fresh leaves from the sallaki plant,
Who stood adoring her, eager to grasp
What the tender-loving hands would grant—(15 a-b)

Rama (*pathetically and eagerly*). What do you say of him?

Voice. **Sporting in the water with his mate,**
Turns on an elephant, mighty of limb,
Who in the heat of wantonness and pride
Dares in rivalry to challenge him. (15 c-d)

Sita. Who will help him now?

Rama. Where is the wicked creature daring to attack my dear one's pet while he is in play with his mate? (*Rises.*)

Vasanti (*entering in haste*). What, is the king here, the joy of the Raghu race?

Sita. How? Is this my dear friend, Vasanti?

Vasanti. Victory to the king!

Rama (*observing her*). What! My queen's close friend, Vasanti?

Vasanti. Hurry, hurry, king! Come down to the Godavari, by Sita's pool, south of Jatayu's mountain, and rescue the queen's pet!

Sita. Ah, father Jatayu! The Janasthana seems a wilderness without you.

Rama. These allusions to the past shatter my heart.

Vasanti. This way, king, this way !

Sita. Honored lady, is it really true that the woodland deities cannot see me?

Tamasa. You must know, my dear, that the goddess of the Ganges surpasses in power all other deities. Then why be afraid?

Sita. Then follow (*They walk about.*)

Rama. I bow to you, noble Godavari.

Vasanti (*observing*). King, rejoice at the victory which the queen's pet has won !

Rama. Long life to him and many victories !

Sita. Oh, he has grown so large !

Rama. Queen, you should be congratulated.

Your pet, who with his lotus-tender tusk
Once robbed your ear of a lavali leaf,
Now gains all blessings that attend on youth,
Of all rut-shedding elephants the chief ! (16)

Sita. May he live long and never be separated from his gentle mate !

Rama. Look, look, dear Vasanti ! Our pet has even learned the arts of courtship

First he gave her shining lotus-stalks
Torn in frolic from the bottom's gloom;
Then, he sprinkled her with baths of water
Perfumed with rich scented lotus bloom.
Mouth and trunk poured their refreshing showers,
Free offerings from an idolator.
Last, his trunk grasped a broad lotus leaf
Held as an umbrella over her. (17)

Sita. Dear Tamasa, this one has grown to maturity but through all these years I have never known how my Kusa and Lava have grown.

Tamasa. Surely, they have grown just as he has.

Sita. It is my wretched fortune to be separated forever not only from my lord but from my sons.

Tamasa. That has been decreed.

Sita. Why should I have borne sons with pure lotus-like faces, blooming cheeks and shining, handsome teeth, with such laughter and gaiety and with the locks of the warrior class hanging down over their foreheads, if my noble lord should not have kissed them?

Tamasa. If the gods are willing, perhaps he shall.

Sita. Dear Tamasa, now as I am thinking lovingly of my sons while their father is nearby, my breasts heave with overflowing milk and for just a moment I seem to enjoy family happiness.

Tamasa. That hardly needs saying. For, surely,

The noble knot of marriage is fashioned of
The warmth whereby we give our children love. (18)

Vasanti. Please, your Majesty, look in this direction, too.

Here is the peacock with his diadem,
Proud feathers quivering in full display,
Calling from the tall kadamba tree.—
Your dear wife nourished him from day to day. (19)

Sita (*with wonder and affection*). It is he, it is he !

Rama. Be happy, darling, be happy !

Sita. So be it.

Rama. **Ah, I recall you almost as my child,**
Dancing to Sita's softly clapping hands,
Who also by the rolling of her eyes
Held you bound to her beloved commands. (20)

Even animals remember old friendships.

This kadamba tree
Sprinkled with blossoms here
Was once, in time long past,
Nourished by my dear. (21 a-b)

Sita (*observing, with tears*). My husband recognizes it rightly.

The mountain-peacock, perched
Upon this flowering tree,
Remembers her, and so
Shouts in ecstasy. (21 c-d)

Vasanti. Your Majesty, sit down here. (*Rama sits down.*)

Here is the rocky ledge on which we lay,
Sheltered by boughs the breezes, faintly stir;
Here Sita fed the fawns with tender grass,
Who still draw near in memory of her. (22)

Rama. I cannot even bear to see this. (*He weeps and sits elsewhere.*)

Sita. Friend, Vasanti, what good has come of showing this place to my lord and to me? Ah, my noble lord is the same; the Panchavati wood is the same; and here is my same dear companion, Vasanti; these woodland spots beside the Godavari that witnessed our confidential intercourse are the same; these are the same deer, birds and trees. We loved them all just as if they were our children. I am the same. But for me none of this exists. The changes in our mortal world are too great !

Vasanti. Sita, my friend, why do you not recognize Rama's condition ?

He who was like blue lotus to our eyes
Is now turned pale and withered, in tragic plight;
Yet even in this miserable state
Remains to us our center of delight. (23)

Sita. I see it, my friend, I see it.

Tamasa. May you always enjoy the sight of your husband !

Sita. What misfortune ! Who could have imagined even in a dream that I could be separated from him and he from me? Though it is only for a moment and as though I should meet him in another birth, let me see my loving husband between my floods of tears? (*She looks at him.*)

Tamasa (*embracing Sita warmly*).

Floating on an overflowing flood
Of tears, where misery and joy unite,
Straining to see your lord, your moist eyes swell
To bathe the image in seas of milk and light. (24)

Vasanti. **Trees, drop your riches on him, flowers and fruit;**
Winds, heavy with scent, perfume our neighbourhood;
Birds, sing sweetly without ever ceasing,
King Rama has come in person to this wood ! (25)

Rama. Come, Vasanti, my friend, sit here !

Vasanti. Great king, is Prince Lakshmana well?

Rama (*pretending not to hear*).

On seeing trees, loved birds and deer that Sita
Once tended, nourishing from her lotus hand,
Holding wild rice and grass, emotions seize me
No heart, though made of granite, could withstand. (26)

Vasanti. I asked my lord if Lakshmana is well?

Rama (*aside*). She calls me 'great king,' a cold and formal way of speaking, and makes a sad and faltering inquiry for Lakshmana only; so I judge she knows about Sita. (*aloud*) Oh yes, Prince Lakshmana is well.

Vasanti (*weeping*). My lord, why are you so cruel?

Sita. Dear Vasanti, why speak to him like this? My husband deserves kindness from all, especially from my friend.

Vasanti. **'You are my life, you are my second heart,**
Ambrosia to my body, moonlight to my eyes.'
Your words beguiled my simple-loving soul,
But now, what matters ?—All joy within me dies. (27)
(*Vasanti swoons.*)

Tamasa. It is quite natural that she should break off speaking and faint.

Rama. Take heart, my friend, take heart !

Vasanti (*recovering*). But why did your Majesty do this unworthy act?

Sita. Stop, stop, Vasanti !

Rama. Because the people would not tolerate her presence in the palace.

Vasanti. And why?

Rama. They knew—who cares for the reason?

Tamasa. You might have rebuked them.

Vasanti. **You have a heart of stone. If you profess**
Honor, tell me, is such conduct fit ?
You left your fawn-eyed wife in the wild forest.
Tell me, my lord, what can you make of it ? (28)

Sita. Friend Vasanti, you are the cruel one to increase his sorrows.

Tamasa. No, it is love and grief together that speak so.

Rama. Dear friend, what else could I think?

Surely, her body, tender as lotus creepers,
Soft as the springtime moonlight, has been drawn
Apart by beasts, her womb already throbbing,
Eyeballs trembling, like a yearling fawn. (29)

Sita. My lord, here I am alive.

Rama. Ah, Sita, where are you?

Sita. Oh, my husband is weeping aloud !

Tamasa. Dear child, this is natural. Sorrowing persons must find an outlet for sorrow.

When jars are flooded, they must overflow;
When hearts are troubled, tongues must tell their woe.
(30)

This is especially true for Rama, whose life has been so full of sorrow.

He is the lawful guardian of the world;
Grief for his beloved withers his heart.
Since he deserted Sita in the forest
Lamentations treble the wound's smart
But cannot cure it. Yet without those tears
Rama's body and soul would surely part. (31)

Rama. Ah, ah !

I swoon but come to consciousness again;
Grief lacerates my heart but will not break it.
My body burns but will not turn to ash;
Fate strikes my life and yet death will not take it. (32)

Sita. How true !

Rama. Oh, my worthy citizens and country-folk,

When you no longer wished my queen to stay
Beside me, like a wretch I cast her off.
Now in familiar scenes I mourn for her,
Melting in tears.—Good people, do not scoff ! (33)

Tamasa. How deeply this ocean tide of grief resounds !

Vasanti. My lord, you should endure with firmness whatever now belongs to the past.

Rama. **It is twelve years since Sita came to ill,**
Her name forgotten, yet Rama living still ! (34)

Sita. I am distracted by my lord's words.

Tamasa. How true, my dear !

Words blending love with grief are falling on you;
Streams of honey and poison drop upon you. (35)

Rama. O Vasanti,

Have I not endured the poisoned dart
Rankling with frightful venom in my heart? (36)

Sita. So I have once more become troublesome to my noble lord !

Rama. Although I have held my feelings firmly in check, I have fallen into uncontrollable distress meeting so many objects once so dear to me.

Distraction reigns where breasts cannot withstand
Their sorrows; torrents burst frail dams of sand. (37)

Sita. By seeing my lord's suffering and hearing his terrible exclamations I myself grow more and more bewildered.

Vasanti (*aside*). The king has fallen into a deeper melancholy, so I shall try to divert his attention. (*aloud*) Please, my lord, look at some of these sights in the Janasthana that were long familiar to you.

Rama. Just as you say. (*Rises and walks around.*)

Sita. I think my dear friend's plan to cure his grief will only enflame it.

Vasanti. King, king,

This is the bower of creepers where you waited
For her return when she had gone away
Lingering too long by Godavari's sands
To watch the beauty of great swans at play.
When she at length returned to where you stood,
Observing that her lord was somewhat vexed,
Her suppliant hands enfolded like a bud
Of lotus, she stood silent and perplexed. (38)

Sita. Vasanti, you are cruel to drive arrows further into his heart. You are repeatedly making my husband think of me and my wretchedness.

Rama. Cruel Sita, I seem to see you everywhere and yet you show no mercy.

Dear queen, my heart and body fall asunder;
All the world seems void because of you
My lonely soul expires in flames of darkness.
Stupor engulfs me. Ah, what can I do ? (39)

(*Rama faints.*)

Sita. Oh, my husband has fainted once more !

Vasanti. Take heart, take heart !

Sita. O, my lord ! The welfare of the world depends on you and your life falls again and again in danger because of such a wretched woman as me. I feel that I am dying. (*Swoons.*)

Tamasa. Take heart, my child, take heart ! Your touch will again be the one means for restoring dear Rama to consciousness.

Vasanti. Look, he has not come to life even yet ! Ah, dear Sita, where are you? Quick, revive the lord of your life !

(*Sita goes to Rama and touches his heart and forehead.*)

Fortunately dear Rama has come to life again.

Rama. **This touch, as if it should anoint my body**
Inside and out with some ambrosial dew,
Has brought me back to life and then infused me
With some delicious numbness, strange and new. (40)

(*with his eyes closed from delight*) Friend Vasanti, this is an occasion for rejoicing.

Vasanti. Why?

Rama. Why not? Sita has returned !

Vasanti. How, dear Rama; where is she?

Rama (*showing that he feels her touch*). Look ! Isn't she just here in front of us?

Vasanti. Why, my dear, must you burn my heart again and again with these wild ravings, when I am already consumed with Sita's sufferings?

Sita. I want to take my hand away but I cannot. My lord's cool and gentle touch, that comes only from his pure affection, changes my own hand, so weak, moist and trembling, into adamantine stone. I cannot move ! I am helpless !

Rama. No, not ravings, my friend.

That hand bordered by bracelets that I once
Clasped in the marriage-ceremony, which gave
Such cool, ambrosial pleasure, and which also
For the mere asking I could always have— (41 a-b)

Sita. Husband ! You are always the same, then and now !

Rama. **That hand, that selfsame hand of hers which only**
Is likened to leaves of the lavali tree,
Or to its sister hand, has once again
With purest ecstasy been given to me. (41 c-d)

(*He grasps her hand.*)

Sita. How fearful ! His eyes are one moment wandering and the next fixed, at one time dazed and the next widly rolling. He has lost all control of himself.

Tamasa (*looking at Sita with affection and smiles*).

The touch of her dear lord has caused my child
To tremble and thrill with moisture, just as trees
Bloom with new buds when, suddenly, the spring
Wets them with showers or shakes them with her breeze.
(43)

Sita (*aside*). Why ! Tamasa has put me to shame for my loss of control. How can she forgive my affection and my abandonment coming together?

Rama (*looking around*). Ha ! then she is really not here? Cruel Sita !

Sita. I must certainly be cruel to see you in this condition and still to live.

Rama. Where are you, Sita? Have pity on me ! Do not leave me in this plight !

Sita. Why, my noble lord! The truth is quite the reverse of that.

Vasanti. Please, my lord, be calm. Use your supernatural courage to control yourself. How could my dear friend have been here?

Rama. Evidently she is not here. Otherwise how could even Vasanti fail to see her? Can this all have been a dream? But I have not slept. How could Rama sleep? Sleep has long deserted me. Undoubtedly it must be the almighty spirit of delusion evoked by my brooding over her image that haunts me.

Sita. Then I am the cruel one who has deluded him !

Vasanti. Look, king:

See the iron chariot of Ravana,
The demon, fallen broken to the ground;
Here lie the skeletons of his goblin donkeys.
The vans of Jatayu are strewn around,
Which furious Ravana clipped with his sword
When liftting frightened Sita up on high,
Much as a raincloud trembles with the lightning,
Then flew to Lanka with her through the sky. (44)

Sita (*terrified*). My lord, father Jatayu is being killed and I am being carried off. Help me, help me !

Rama (*rising swiftly*). Ha ! Friend, you have robbed me of my Sita and Jatayu of his life ! Where are you fleeing?

Vasanti. Why, king, you are the comet of destruction to the demon's race. Can there be any object left for your anger?

Sita. Ah, I have also become mad.

Rama. **That former separation from dear Sita**
Was cause for exploits of heroic kind,
Combats of warriors, fiery, epic battles,
Such as the astonished world keeps long in mind.
Those actions eased me. But what remedies
Can this irrevocable separation find ? (45)

Sita. 'Irrevocable.' Then I am lost !

Rama. How appalling !

She is lost. My friendship with the king of monkeys
Is worthless, all their armies and Jambavant
Can be of no account; even the Wind God's son
Has now no aid nor sustenance to grant.
Nala, offspring of the architect
Of the whole universe, cannot create
A bridgeway to her, nor Lakshmana's arrows
Search out the foe or hope to penetrate. (46)

Sita. Then my first separation seems the more bearable !

Rama. Dear Vasanti, my presence can bring my friends nothing but pain. How long must I keep you in tears? So allow me to go.

Sita (*leaning on Tamasa, in dejection*). Honored Tamasa, my lord is leaving us.

Tamasa. Take heart, child, take heart ! We should also leave in order to go to the noble Bhagirathi and perform the auspicious birthday ceremony for Kusa and Lava.

Sita. Please, honored lady, let me gaze for a moment more at one who is so rarely seen !

Rama. I have a consort now to aid in the ritual of the horse-sacrifice.

Sita (*trembling*). Who, my husband?

Rama. A golden image of Sita.

Sita (*with a sigh of relief*). Now you are truly my lord ! My husband has at last plucked out the dart of shame and abandonment.

Rama. I shall now comfort tear-stained eyes by gazing at that.

Sita. That is a blessed image so favored by my noble lord, the pillar for the world's hope !

Tamasa (*embracing Sita and smiling*). My child, in saying that you praise yourself.

Sita (*looking down bashfully, aside*). The revered Tamasa is smiling at me.

Vasanti. This meeting has been a great favor to me. Order your going so as to prevent any negligence in duty.

Sita. Vasanti is unfavorable to me.

Tamasa. Come, child, we should be going.

Sita (*sorrowfully*). Possibly we should do so.

Tamasa. **How can you go when to withdraw your eye**
From the loved form would surely be to die? (47)

Sita. I bow in homage to the lotus feet of my lord, who is seen only as reward of extraordinary merit. (*Swoons.*)

Tamasa. Take heart, my child, take heart !

Sita (*coming to herself*). How long can one hope to see the full moon through an opening in the clouds?

Tamasa. How wonderful the ordering of events has been !

Pathos has been our theme through its diversity
Of causes; to one purpose all was done,
As water flows in eddies, billows, bubbles,
And yet, however it flows, is always one. (48)

Rama. Come, my best of aerial chariots ! (*All rise.*)

Tamasa and Vasanti (*to Rama and Sita respectively*).

May Earth and Ganges, River of the Gods,
With others like us, and may your family
Preceptor, the discoverer of metres,
With Arundhati, grant you prosperity ! (49)

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

Act Four

Kausalya and Janaka

(Enter two Boys from Valmiki's hermitage.)

First Boy. Saudhataki, just observe the beauty of this hermitage of the revered Valmiki ! These decorations are preparations made for our large number of distinguished guests. For

This deer, inhabiting our hermitage,
Is sipping the warm rice with a good will
Left over from that portion when the doe,
His mate, who dropped her fawn, had had her fill.
The fragrance of our vegetable cooking,
Mixed with warm broth and blended with our ghee,
Perfumes the air on every side and sweetens
Our festive atmosphere most genially. (1)

Saudhataki. Well, the grey-beards are most welcome because they bring us our holiday.

First Boy. You have a very peculiar motive for approving festivities that inspire reverence for our teachers.

Saudhataki. Tell me, Dandayana, what is the name of the learned master who has first come with this crowd of pious women ?

Dandayana. Oh, stop your joking ! You know very well that it is the revered Vasishtha, just come from Rishyasringa's hermitage, with the wives of our former king, Dasaratha, the noble Arundhati in the lead. Why do you ask such stupid questions ?

Saudhataki. Oh, Vasishtha ?

Dandayana. Why, of course.

Saudhataki. As far as I can see, he might be a tiger or a wolf.

Dandayana. Why do you say that?

Saudhataki. Why, the moment he arrived he downed our poor dear heifer.

Dandayana. Well, you know that it is prescribed in the sacred books that when a learned brahman arrives his pious host offers him a heifer, a bull or a goat. The writers on ceremony state this as an absolute obligation.

Saudhataki. Ha, I have caught you!

Dandayana. How so?

Saudhataki. Why, when the revered Vasishtha came, the heifer was killed and when later today the royal sage, Janaka, arrived, even the scrupulous Valmiki himself served only curds and honey as his welcome offering and never so much as touched a calf.

Dandayana. But the sages prescribe a special ritual for persons who are fasting and deny themselves meat. Valmiki has not done so but Janaka has.

Saudhataki. Why is that?

Dandayana. Because the moment Janaka heard of queen Sita's calamity, he commenced the life of an anchorite and for some years has engaged in religious austerities in the penance grove of Chandradvipa.

Saudhataki. Then why has he came here?

Dandayana. Only to meet his old and good friend, Valmiki.

Saudhataki. Has he as yet met his relatives by marriage?

Dandayana. Only a moment ago the illustrious Vasishtha sent the noble Arundhati to queen Kausalya, asking her to go in person and meet Janaka.

Saudhataki. Now that these old people are gathering together, it is only fair that we and our companions should do the same and enjoy ourselves in honor of this remarkable holiday.

(*They walk round.*)

Dandayana. Look, here is that old royal sage and student of the Vedas, king Janaka, who has already paid his respects to Valmiki and Vasishtha and is now resting in the shade of this tree outside the hermitage. He is always grieving for his daughter.

Sita's sorrow smoulders in his heart
As a tree burning in its inmost part. (2)

Janaka (*entering*). The sorrow that my daughter suffers gnaws

My heart and overwhelms all joy of life.
Though the action be itself long past,
It cuts my very being like a knife. (3)

What a calamity! My miserable body does not die, though its elements are withered by age and consumed by grief and by both periodic and continual fastings. Religious men hold that men who kill themselves are assigned to senseless worlds called Andhatamisra. My agony is fresh after many years. Continual meditation and brooding make the images as vivid as ever. Oh, dear Sita, sprung from sacrificial earth, sacred to the gods, your fortune so far contradicts your birth that from the terrible shame of it I cannot even weep ! Ah, my daugher;

Well do I recall your flower-like face
Rich with smiles and tears; how the dear child
Was ever prattling from her pretty mouth
Happy nonsense, faltering and wild. (4)

Oh, revered Earth, you are exceedingly cruel:

Why, ruthless Earth, did you permit the slaughter
Of one whom all the gods knew wholly good,
You who brought her forth as Speech did Learning
Into her pure and perfect womanhood ?
The sage Vasishtha's wife, queen Arundhati,
And holy Ganges knew her virtues, too,
Also the Sun himself in all his glory,
The arch-preceptor of the clan Raghu. (5)

Voice (*behind the curtain*). This way, this way, great Queen !

Janaka (*looking*). Ha ! here comes the revered Arundhati, with Grishti as her chamberlain leading the way. (*rising*) But whom does he call 'great Queen?' (*observing*) Ah ! who should it be but my dear friend Kausalya, wife of the late king Dasaratha ! Who could believe that it is she?

In Dasaratha's house she was the goddess
Of wealth, or rather, she herself was Wealth.
Now she is either Grief itself, or nothing.—
How transient are our days of joy and health ! (6)

Ah, the reversals of destiny !

Also, Kausalya, the very person
Who once feasted my eyes, does so no more.
The very sight of her becomes unbearable,
Like strongest brine poured on an open sore. (7)

(*Enter Arundhati, Kausalya and Grishti.*)

Arundhati. Were you not directed by your family preceptor, Vasishtha, to come in person to see the revered Valmiki? I received this direction as well. Then why do you hesitate at every step?

Grishti. Queen, I beg you, take courage and follow the direction of the noble Vasishtha.

Kausalya. When I find myself compelled to meet Janaka, my griefs all at once overwhelm me. I cannot hold myself together. My heart's fibres are breaking.

Arundhati. Who could doubt it?

The grief men feel when torn apart from those
Close and dear to them causes gnawing pain.
When we see one of these, we think of others
Unseen, and bitter grief resumes again. (8)

Kausalya. When my dear daugher-in-law Sita has suffered such a calamity, how can we look the royal sage, her father, in the face?

Arundhati.

Here is your cousin, chief of the Janaka,
To whom Yajnavalkya taught the law of Brahma. (9)

Kausalya. Indeed this royal sage, the father of my dear Sita, was the chief joy in the heart of my royal husband, Dasaratha. Oh, I am reminded of the times when every day bloomed as a festival ! All this is past !

Janaka (*approaching*). Noble Arundhati ! Janaka, whose emblem is the plow, bows to you.

I honor you with head bowed low to earth.—
When in your company even your lord,
Although he be a store of holy light,
Considers himself still more to be adored.
You are the fountain of eternal bliss,
The child of dawn, emblem of heaven's accord. (10)

Arundhati. May the Supreme Light shine on you ! May the radiant god who stands beyond night and passion purify you !

Janaka. Honored Grishti, is that mother of the king who shepherds his subjects so well in good health?

Grishti (*aside*). He has bitterly reproved us. (*aloud*) Royal saint ! It is cruel of you to add to the sorrows of queen Kausalya, who has already resented all this and for such a long time has declined to see the moon-bright face of her dear son Rama. A stroke of strange misfortune occurred when Rama's subjects, as we all know, spread abroad that loathsome slandar against Sita. He himself committed his cruel act because those contemptible men distrusted the fire-ordeal.

Janaka. Ah ! Who is this Fire that he should presume to purify our daughter? After Rama has insulted us we are insulted again when people speak like this.

Arundhati (*sighing*). He is right. It is preposterous to mention fire in connection with Sita. Fire cannot purify one who is pure. To say 'Sita' is enough. Oh, my dear girl;

You are my child, my pupil. But your worth
Demands that my devotion fall on you.
Not sex, nor age nor eminence of birth
But goodness holds you in our reverend view. (11)

Kausalya. Ah, my agony breaks my heart-strings. (*Swoons.*)

Janaka. Ha, what has happened here?

Arundhati. What else could happen, royal saint?

That dead king, those glad days, and those dear children
Flashed on her memory, seeing you, her friend.—
You must know why in her despair she fainted.
Female spirits are tender and prone to bend. (12)

Janaka. Ah, I have been much too cruel by looking unkindly on this dear wife of my old friend, Dasaratha, a woman whom I have not met in such a long time.

He was my dearest relative and friend,
My heart, my joy, my one felicity,
Dearer to me than body, life or wealth,
Dasaratha was all things in life to me. (13)

And is this truly Kausalya?

Whatever trouble between wife and husband
Arose, I was the one to hear the plea;
Whether the future brought forebearance or anger
Rested henceforth altogether with me. (14)

Arundhati. Ah, she barely breathes; her heart has almost stopped beating.

Janaka. Here, my good friend. (*Sprinkles her with water from his ascetic gourd.*)

Grishti. **Fortune first showed as our auspicious friend,**
With unmixed pleasure satiating the heart.
Fate, in swift and terrible reversal,
All the more sharply makes disaster smart. (15)

Kausalya (*recovering*). Sita, my child, where are you? I remember your lotus face, your natural smile that played over it and the radiance pouring from it from the recent sacrament of marriage. If you could only once again, my darling, brighten my lap with your limbs like glittering moonlight! King Dasaratha would always say: 'She may be daughter-in-law to the mightier ancestors of the Raghu race but our friendship with Janaka is so great that she is simply our dear daughter!'

Grishti. It was just as the queen said:

Although king Dasaratha had five children,
Rama, Subahu's conqueror, he loved best;
Among four daughter-in-laws the king prized Sita
Even as his daughter, Santa, above the rest. (16)

Janaka. Ah, my dearest friend, the great king, Dasaratha! You are still the nearest to my heart. How could I forget you?

It is customary for the bride
To honor kinsfolk of the son-in-law,
But in our instance this was all reversed.
You honored me, as all observers saw.
You were snatched away; and Sita also
To an untimely, cruel death was hurled,
Thus auguring the end of our connection—
I am a sinner in a hellish world! (17)

Kausalya. Sita, my dear, what can I do? Life is cemented into my body and will not leave me, regardless of how much I long for death and how wretched I am.

Arundhati. Have courage, princess! Tears must sometimes be dismissed. Do you not recall what Vasishtha, your family preceptor, said in Rishyasringa's hermitage. 'The inevitable must take place but the end will be gracious.'

Kausalya. How so, when no wishes of mine can be fulfilled? I have outlived them all.

Arundhati. Can you, a daughter of religious kings, doubt the word of a sage? You should not doubt it. It must come true.

Utterances of brahmans are all faithful;
This should be kept religiously in view.
Their speech waits upon the God of Riches;
They never utter words that are untrue. (18)

(*A noise behind the curtain; all listen.*)

Janaka. Boys playing at games make this commotion. Today is their holiday, in honor of the guests.

Kausalya. How easily joy comes to children! (*observing*) Ah, who is this youth in the midst, handsome, supple, comely and graceful as dear Rama?

Arundhati (*aside, with tears of joy*). This must be the secret that Bhagirathi told me, like nectar to my ears. Only we do not know which he may be, Kusa or Lava.

Janaka. **Who is this spirited being suddenly seen,**
Blue as the color of a lotus leaf,
Distinguished from his playmates by his grace,
Wearing round locks of a Kshatriya chief?
His form is like an ointment to my eyes.
Who is this joyful creature that I see?
This is as though Rama should come again
A child himself once more! Who can it be? (19)

Grishti. I judge the youth must be a student from some princely family.

Janaka. Possibly, for look:

He bears on either side upon his back
A cluster of quivers whose arrows kiss his crest;
He wears the dark hide of a mountain deer;
Signs in holy ashes mark his chest.
His lower garment is dyed with crimson madder,
Round which a girdle of sacred grass is bent.
He holds in hand his rosary and his bow;
A pippla staff fulfills his complement. (20)

What do you think, Arundhati? Where can he be from?

Arundhati. Who knows? We ourselves only came here to day.

Janaka. Good chamberlain, I am extremely curious. Go at once to the revered Valmiki and ask him. Also, tell the child that some elders are eager to speak with him.

Grishti. As you command me ! (*Exit.*)

Kausalya. What do you think? Will he come when he is asked in this way?

Arundhati. How could anyone with so graceful a form lack gracious manners?

Kausalya. Look ! He has listened to the chamberlain with the deepest respect. He has even dismissed the other ascetic boys. The dear fellow is coming here directly.

Janaka (*observing*). Ah, how wonderful this is !

Candor, youth and modesty adorn him;
Virtues the wise note and the vulgar miss.
As some small magnet draws a mass of iron,
My own numbed mind finds ecstasy in this. (21)

Lava (*entering*). How shall I make my salutation to persons whose names, family and rank I do not know but who clearly command my respect? The elders say this manner of salutation is unexceptionable. (*approaching them modestly*) Lava bows to each of you in turn.

Arundhati and Janaka. Long life to you, blest boy !

Kausalya. Long life, my darling !

Arundhati. Come here, dear boy. (*seating Lava on her lap; aside*). After such a prolonged, dreary time of longing my lap is filled and my longing gratified.

Kausalya. Dear boy, come to me, too ! (*taking him on her lap*) Oh, I am reminded of Rama by his body glowing darkly like a half-opened sapphire lotus, by his voice, deep as a swan's cry when its throat is compressed by lotus filaments, but above

all by his flesh, subtle to the touch as the core of the full-blown lotus ! My boy, let me look into your lotus face ! (*lifting his chin and observing closely, with tears of emotion*) See, royal saint ! If you look closely, his face is much like the moon-like face of my daughter-in-law, Sita.

Janaka. I see, my friend, I see.

Kausalya. My dazed heart surmises something strange about this boy.

Janaka. **In him the lineaments of my daughter, Sita,**
And Rama are combined, in him displayed
The modesty, the lustre and the grandeur,
The eloquent voice. Ah, why am I so swayed? (22)

Kausalya. Dear boy, is your mother living? Do you remember your father?

Lava. No, no.

Kausalya. Whose son are you?

Lava. The revered Valmiki's.

Kausalya. O my darling, say what is right.

Lava. This is all I know.

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Ho there, soldiers ! Prince Chandraketu orders no one to trespass on the grounds of the hermitage.

Arundhati and Janaka. Oh, this is a happy day for us. Chandraketu is here, coming as a guard for the sacrificial horse.

Kausalya. 'Prince Chandraketu, son of Lakshmana, orders'— This is what I hear, charming to me as drops of nectar.

Lava. Honored sir ! Who is this Chandraketu?

Janaka. Do you know of Rama and Lakshmana, sons of Dasaratha?

Lava. They are the heroes of the poem called *Ramayana.*

Janaka. That is so indeed.

Lava. Then how could I possibly not know them?

Janaka. Chandraketu is the son of Lakshmana.

Lava. Then he is the son of Urmila and grandson of the royal saint, Janaka.

Arundhati (*smiling*). The boy shows a fine knowledge of the poem.

Janaka. If you know that history so well, answer this. What are the names of Dasaratha's sons and who are their mothers?

Lava. Neither I nor anyone else has heard that canto of the poem.

Janaka. What? Has it not been composed?

Lava. Composed but not published. However, a part has been arranged in a different form, instilled with moving sentiments and adapted for theatrical presentation. After writing it with his own hand, the poetic sage, Valmiki, sent it to Bharata, author of the *Aphorisms on Dramaturgy*.

Janaka. Why did he do that?

Lava. The revered sage, Bharata, will have it produced by divine beings perfect in the performing arts, the Apsarases.

Janaka. This becomes more and more wonderful.

Lava. The revered Valmiki has taken great pains in this matter. His script when sent to Bharat's hermitage by some pupils and my brother was dispatched with an escort bow in hand to ward off danger.

Kausalya. What, dear boy, you have a brother?

Lava. Yes, his name is noble Kusa.

Kausalya. The word ' noble ' I suppose means that he is the elder.

Lava. Yes, he is my older brother, in one birth.

Janaka. You mean that you are twins?

Lava. That is so.

Janaka. I am much concerned. Tell me, how far in the story has the published part of the poem gone?

Lava. The king complied with the calumnies of the people and banished Sita, born from holy ground during a sacrifice to the gods; as the pangs of childbirth approached her, Lakshmana left her in the forest and returned to the palace at Ayodhya—here the story stops.

Kausalya. O, dear girl with the lovely, moon-like face ! I wonder what end of the cruel sport came to your flower-like body when you were deserted in the forest?

Janaka. Ah, my child,

Surely, when that indignity fell on you,
Forest exile, childbirth, misery,
When the flesh-eating monsters thronged about you,
More than once you must have longed for me ! (23)

Lava (*to Arundhati*). Lady, who are these persons?

Arundhati. This is Kausalya and this is Janaka. (*Lava looks at them sorrowfully and respectfully.*)

Janaka. Ah, the citizens' wickedness and Rama's rashness !

When I brood upon this thunderbolt
That struck us, knowing nothing could be worse,
I think my time has come for rage to kindle
In flames, venting an arrow or a curse. (24 a-b)

Kausalya (*with dismay*). Revered lady, pacify the enraged king!

Arundhati.

When the high-spirited are so insulted
It is natural that the wrong should be corrected.
King, Lord Rama is a son of yours
And subjects, though perverse, should be protected. (25)

Janaka. **Peace, then, let neither curse nor arrow fall**
On Rama, for he is noble and my son.
His subjects are merely brahmans, children, dullards,
Decrepits and females, foolish every one ! (24 c-d)

Boys (*entering in an excited state*). Friend, there is a strange creature called a horse. We have seen it today with our own eyes !

Lava. A horse, as you call it, is described in the catalogue of animals and in books on warfare. Tell me how he looks?

Boys. **Behind he has a flowing tail, and this**
He waves; he has four hoofs; his neck is long;
His dung, the shape of mangoes—but why talk?
He runs, and will soon be gone. Follow the throng ! (26)

(*They pull Lava by his hands and deerskin coat.*)

Lava (*with a look expressing both curiosity and fear of offending*). Good people, look, I am dragged off by these boys. (*He runs rapidly around.*)

Arundhati and Janaka. Satisfy your curiosity, dear boy.

Kausalya. Now that he is out of sight. I feel as though I were robbed. Let us move on and see where he is going.

Arundhati. How can you keep that nimble boy in sight? He must be far away by now.

Grishti (*entering*). The revered Valmiki says that in good time you will know the meaning of this.

Janaka. Then it must be mysterious and important. We should all go to see the sage Valmiki. Come ! (*Exeunt all the old people. Enter a few boys.*)

Boys. Friend, look at this wonderful sight !

Lava. I see it and understand it. This is evidently a sacrificial horse.

Boys. How do you know?

Lava. Surely, you are fools, for you must have read the entry about it. 'The horse must have an escort of a hundred men in each of the main divisions, armor bearers, mace bearers and bowmen.' This force clearly is composed in this way. If you doubt me, go and ask.

Boys. Ho ! ho ! Why is this horse turned loose and also guarded?

Lava (*enviously; aside*). The horse-sacrifice is the great and glorious test of world-conquering warriors. It was devised to abash all the rest of us warriors.

Voice (*behind the curtain*).

This horse is like a banner or proclamation
Of Rama, hero of the seven worlds,
Foe to the race of the ten-necked Ravana:
This horse is like a banner his pride unfurls. (27)

Lava (*with wounded pride*). What irritating language !

Boys. What do you think of this? Evidently our leader understands these things.

Lava. Ho ! ho ! Are proclamations made in this style because there are no other heroes in the world but the Kshatriyas?

Voice (*behind the curtain*). You, sir ! What warriors can compare with the great king Rama ?

Lava. Shame on you, boasters !

If there are kshatriyas, so be it; as for your banner,
Your scarecrow, your proclamation—I take by force
Whatever I will. Why waste words? I am seizing
The thing you call a banner but I a horse ! (28)

Here, boys ! Hem the horse in and then drive it with clods of earth ! Let the poor creature graze with the deer !

Soldier (*entering, indignant and arrogant*). Impudent boy ! What was it you said? Never suppose that these ranks of strong and blood-thirsty soldiers will put up with a child's insolence ! Prince Chandraketu knows how to punish an enemy but is away at the moment enjoying a glance at these strange and friendly forests. So run and hide in this dark thicket before he returns !

Boys. Let the horse be, leader, for these soldiers threaten you with their flashing weapons ! Our hermitage is a long way off. So run like bounding deer !

Lava (*laughing*). What, are the weapons really flashing? (*stringing his bow*).

Then watch this bow, lapping its tongue of string,
Emitting a roar, enlarging its fearful girth,
Yawning as the grinning jaws of death,
Twang, and with thunder swallow up the earth ! (29)

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

Act Five

Princes in Combat

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Ho, soldiers ! Our relief has come, our relief has come !

Here is Chandraketu urging forward
His chariot, Sumantra for his charioteer,
His battle-flag shakes madly with each jolting.
Hearing of war, the youthful prince is here. (1)

(*Enter Chandraketu in his chariot, with drawn bow and an expression of haste, joy and wonder, accompanied by his charioteer, Sumantra.*)

Chandraketu. Look, noble Sumantra, look !

His handsome face flushed with a tinge of anger,
His five locks streaming as the breezes blow,
He takes his station in the van of battle,
Twanging incessantly his fatal bow. (2)

How wonderful !

This boy, bred in a hermitage, alone,
Pursues my thousands in a fearless chase,
Pouring arrows on them from all sides,
Confronting mighty tuskers face to face,
Cleaving with deadly shafts their temple-joints
As if some offspring of the Raghu race. (3)

Sumantra. My noble lord,

Seeing this boy who in high prowess excels
Demons and gods, Rama seems living twice.
He calls to mind how Rama fought when once
Guarding Visvamitra's sacrifice. (4)

Chandraketu. I am ashamed at heart that so many of our soldiers in scattered ranks are contending against only one man.

This boy fights one alone and all about
My soldiers circle him, their strong, broad palms
Filled with multitudinous weapons; some,
Mounted on chariots, wield their shining arms,
Some mount maddened elephants, whose bells
Add clangor to the fury of war's alarms. (5)

Sumantra. Dear boy, even if these men were united, they could do nothing against him. In disorder they are helpless.

Chandraketu. Hurry, my friend, hurry ! This lad is creating havoc among troops I am obliged to protect. For look,

The hero's shouting amplifies the noise
His bowstring makes, which gives excessive pain
To ears of elephants on whom the roar
And thunder of battle-drums in clangor rain.
Gobs of food rejected by the mouth
Of Death, sated with slaughter, strew the plain. (6)

Sumantra (*aside*). How can I allow Chandraketu to fight singly with such a champion? (*thinking*) But I have grown old in the tradition of this warrior family and what can be done when we are faced with a fight?

Chandraketu (*with astonishment, shame and confusion*). What disgrace! My troops have fled in all directions.

Sumantra (*driving the chariot faster*). My lord, now the hero comes within hailing distance.

Chandraketu (*broodingly*). Friend, what name did the heralds give him?

Sumantra. They called him ' Lava.'

Chandraketu.

Ho, noble Lava, why strike common men ?
These are not the conquest you desire.
I am here. Direct your blows on me.
Answer my call. Let fire be quenched in fire ! (7)

Sumantra. Look, Prince:

Look, at your summons where the hero comes
Answering the challenge that we shout,
Just as at sudden thunder a lion's whelp
Stops mauling elephants and wheels about. (8)

(*Enter Lava, with proud and hurried steps.*)

Lava. Bravo, prince, bravo! You are truly an offspring of the Ikshvaku race! So I am here, come to challenge you. (*A great noise behind the curtain. Lava turns back.*) What! does the van of the army return to bar my way after I have routed them completely? Curse them all!

Let the vast clangor rise on every side!
Let the great, wanton and tumultuous roar
Of ocean, wind-blown on a day of doom,
Confess the fury of my battle more,
Reging like mountains dashed upon each other
By fire and tremor from earth's central core! (9)

(*Walks about rapidly.*)

Chandraketu. Listen, young hero:

You are dear to me for your eminence.
What honor has to give let us divide.
Why deal carnage on your own dependents?
I am the only touchstone of your pride. (10)

Lava (*turning round quickly and joyously*). How boldly and yet how courteously this hero of the Sun's race speaks! What have I to do with these common soldiers? I shall salute him. (*Another noise behind the curtain. Lava is angry and disgusted.*) These scoundrels coming between us provoke me out of all patience. (*He advances towards them.*)

Chandraketu. Look, good Sumantra, it is wonderful to see:

This hero, with his bow lifted aloft,
Defiant in his pride and pleasure there
Is like a cloud raised by the storm-god, Indra,
Poised between conflicting gusts of air. (11)

Sumantra. Only the prince can face him. The rest of us are blind with amazement.

Chandraketu. Soldiers,

Shame on you, my army, and shame on me
That for an enemy you here engage
A man on foot; while elephants, horses, chariots
Bear you; he clothed in deer-skin, while you wage
War in armor glittering with gold;
He a slim youth, and you mature in age ! (12)

Lava (*with anger*). What? Does he pity me? (*thoughtfully*) Good ! To save time I shall invoke the missile of Stupefaction and paralyze his army. (*Remains in meditation.*)

Sumantra. What has happened? Why is the roar in our army suddenly hushed?

Lava. Now I shall face the hero alone.

Chandraketu. There can be no doubt of it.

Suddenly a terrible, blinding light,
Blotting out all objects once seen clear,
As darkness-in-light, descends. And then all motion
Is stilled. Now all the combatants appear
Motionless as a picture. The dread missile
That stupifies its victims must be here ! (13)

Wonderful ! Wonderful !

Black as the bowels of hell, the sky is wrapped,
Through magic of the missile, in the shroud
Of midnight, where quick flames of lightning gleam,
As brass that in a furnace seethes aloud
Or as the peak of the Vindhya Mountain
Capped once an eon by its thunder-cloud. (14)

Sumantra. But how could he have obtained these missiles?

Chandraketu. I suppose from Valmiki.

Sumantra. No, dear prince. This is not so with the missiles and above all not with the Missile of Stupefaction. For

They were creations of the sage, Krisasva,
Passed on to Kausika and to Rama. (15)

Chandraketu. But possibly there are others, whose souls are illumined by light of divine wisdom, who see blessed visions and also know all things spontaneously and without instruction.

Sumantra. Prince, take care of yourself ! Your challenger has come back.

The Two Princes (*to each other*). Ha! how noble this Prince is!

Is this chance, is it his excellence,
Some special feature of his life or limb,
Or some acquaintance in a former world
That I look so devotedly on him? (16)

Sumantra. Generally among living beings one feels affection for another. Common people attribute this to the stars or to spontaneous effects but sages conclude love to be causeless and indescribable.

No man controls a deed without a cause.
Friendship is threaded by invisible laws. (17)

The Two Princes (each to the other).

How can I loose any arrow in the face
Of one whose limbs I tremble to embrace ? (18)

Yet after his display of fiery spirit
What other possible alternative
Is there but shooting at him, or what mark
So worthy of my bow can fortune give?
Seeing my weapon ready in hand and still
Unspent, what can this man be thinking of?—
How tragic that the warrior's honor code
Is hostile to the natural force of love ! (19)

Sumantra (*observing Lava intently; with tears; aside*). The condition is desperate.

Where is the hope that fate will spare them now?
No flowers burgeon on a fallen bough. (20)

Chandraketu. Good Sumantra, I shall dismount from my chariot.

Sumantra. Why?

Chandraketu. Why, first, so that the young hero may be honored, and, second, I shall be faithfully observing a law omong the chivalrous: "Men in chariots do not fight with footmen." This is our first law of chivalry.

Sumantra (*aside*). I am in a most difficult position.

How can I forbid a righteous act
Or quench their heated rashness with cool tact? (21)

Chandraketu. Dear friend, what makes you hesitate? Whenever my elders are in doubt in religious or secular matters they turn to you for advice.

Sumantra. Yes, that is true. Your inclinations are faithful to the law.

This is war's everlasting law, the road
Of honor, the lion-hearted Raghu's code. (22)

Chandraketu. Your honor's words are fitting.

No preceptor knows so well as you
All that the Raghu honor holds as due. (23)

Sumantra (*embracing him affectionately; with tears*).

Only a few years past your sire, Lakshmana,
Indrajit's slayer, was born; the line is pure;
You, his son, follow the ancient pattern.
Stability for Raghu's race is sure. (24)

Chandraketu (*sorrowfully*).

How can this stability exist,
The eldest of the clan without an heir?
Dark anxiety besets three brothers;
Apprehension borders on despair. (25)

Sumantra. Chandraketu's words torment my soul.

Lava. My feelings are confused.

As the night-lotus joys when the moon rises,
So does my heart rejoice when he appears.
Yet, this arm of mine yearns for a battle
Fought with brave competitors and peers.
The twanging of my battle-bow reveals
Purest ardor of my youthful years. (26)

Chandraketu (*dismounting*). I am Chandraketu, of the race of the Sun, who salute you.

Sumantra.

May the sacred, splendid and invulnerable
Glory of your ancestors be yours,
And may you have all aid the high god, Vishnu,
Incarnate as a boar, alone confers ! (27)

Besides:

May the Sun, who is the father of your race,
Protect you; may the incomparable guru,
Guide of your clan, Vasishtha, be your aid;
May the Fire God and the Wind God, Indra, Vishnu
And the Eagle give you valor; the magic bows
Of Rama and Lakshmana ever guard you ! (28)

Lava. Prince, you looked like your noble self when you were in your cahriot. We have had enough of this courtesy.

Chandraketu. Then, good soldier, honor another chariot !

Lava. Noble charioteer, lead the prince to his chariot again !

Sumantra. Then you should do as dear Chandraketu wishes.

Lava. Why hesitate, when it becomes a matter of your own equipment? But I am a forester and do not ride in chariots.

Sumantra. You know, heroic boy, how to speak both courteously and proudly. Even if one of Ikshvaku family—I mean Rama himself—saw you, his heart would melt from love.

Lava. Yes, I have heard that the royal sage is a generous man. (*blushing*)

We are by no means of the vulgar sort
To scorn pure sacrifices; the true science
Of valor is embodied in King Rama,—
Still, those men on whom you place reliance
To guard the horse uttered insulting speech
Against kshatriyas and rouse my hot defiance ! (29)

Chandraketu (*smiling*). So, you are jealous even of father Rama's glory?

Lava. Possibly I am, possibly not. But I will ask a question. We have heard that this noble descendant of Raghu is a modest man, famous for self-restraint. Then why do his soldiers talk in a way fit only for demons?

Sages declare the speech of a Rakshasa
Flows from madness, insolence or worse.
Intemperance of tongue, causing all feuds,
Becomes the world's most despicable curse. (30)

They rebuke this kind of language and praise the other:

But wise men say good speech dispels all malice,
Begetting courtesy softer than silk,
Beloved parent of all earthly blessings,
Pouring forth honor as a cow's warm milk. (31)

Sumantra. Valmiki's pupil has nobility of spirit together with pure eloquence instilled by sacred learning.

Lava. Further, Chandraketu, you ask me if I can endure father Rama's glory? But I ask you, are the virtues of chivalry found in one person only?

Sumantra. You do not know the king of Ikshvaku's race. Stop where you are ! Do not overstep the bounds of decency !

Though making in our army such a stir,
You must not slight Rama, the vanquisher ! (32)

Lava (*laughing*). Sir, why all this boasting in behalf of the king because he defeated Parasurama?

No need to say that bravery in words
Pertains to brahmans, bravery in swords
To the kshatriyas. Tell me, what restraint
Had Rama then in vanquishing a saint? (33)

Chandraketu (*agitated*). This is quite enough! There has been far too much talk already.

This is a new and wonderful incarnation
Of valor, in whose eyes even the son
Of Bhrigu is no hero, for who does not
Know that my father's bravery has won
Peace for the seven worlds through the great deeds
Of magnanimity which he has done? (34)

Lava. Is there anyone who does not know the greatness of the Lord of the Raghus? Of course something might be said—but I suppress it.

They are the old folks, their careers must not
Be scrutinized. Peace to them, and let them be!
They are the great ones; if he killed a woman,
The wife of Sunda, he did it valiantly.
And those three steps—I will not say retreat—
That Rama took in his heroic spat
With the demon Khara, or his brawl with Vali—
The people are conversant with all that! (35)

Chandraketu. Boy, your slander of father Rama breaks all bounds!

Lava. Ha, does this man scowl at me?

Sumantra. Anger blazes out everywhere.

Trembling of excitement has unloosed
The forehairs of their foreheads, and their eyes
Glisten like red lotus, while their brows
Are like the red moon in the eastern skies.
The roar of battle is like the hum of bees
Seizing upon a blossom as a prize. (36)

The Two Princes. Come to the right place for our duel.

(*Exeunt omnes.*)

Act Six

The Princes Recognized

(*Enter a pair of resplendent Spirits, in an aerial chariot.*)

Male Spirit. Ah, the courageous deeds of these two offspring of the Solar Race suddenly met in combat blazes in chivalrous lustre, so that gods and demons are lost in wonder ! Look, look, my love:

The marvelous combat, terrible to the worlds,
Is audible through resounding of the bells
Suspended from the bows; to the loud sound
Of these a deadlier battle-music swells
From twanging bowstrings with the violent hum
Of feathered arrows that each weapon expels. (1)

To encourage both the champions, raining blows,
Furious in the fight, there sounds aloud
Frantic music of the battle-drums
As thunder issues from a jet-black cloud. (2)

Let us pour over these heroes a continuous rain of flowers, with a shower of full-blown golden lotuses accompanied by jewel-buds glistening with dew from the garden of the gods.

Female Spirit. Then why does sky suddenly appear saffron, as if enflamed by prongs of sharp lightning?

Male Spirit. Can it be that today

The violet-colored god, immortal Siva,
Prepares to raise the lid of his third eye
That dazzles, as the sun's expanding orb
While his corona flashes through the sky. (3)

Ah, I understand. Prince Chandraketu has unloosed the Fire Missile shooting streaks of wild flame.

Now a multitudinous host of chariots
Scour the sky in splendor to proclaim
A turbulence in heaven, their banners burning !
Look, the empyrean is aflame ! (4)

Marvelous ! Fire spreads far and wide with sparks crackling and splintering from the roaring core of the immense thunder bolt ! A pillar of flame seethes, towers and spreads, emitting unbearable heat. So I shall screen my love with my body and withdraw.

Female Spirit. Ah, the delight that I feel from the touch of my dear lord's body, cool as purest pearl, soft and smooth ! I close my eyes in ecstasy. All pain has vanished !

Male Spirit. What have I done? Or rather,

A well-loved person just by doing nothing
May give the purest pleasures known on earth;
Whoever in this world has a true friend
Owns treasures of inestimable worth. (5)

Female Spirit. Ah, why is the whole heaven suddenly overstrewn with dark rainclouds adorned with playful, iridescent streaks of lightning, like the glistening neck of a love-intoxicated peacock?

Male Spirit. Ha ! this must signify that the Water Missile employed by Prince Lava has quenched the fury of the Fire Missile, pouring over it the deluge of a thousand continuously streaming rainshowers.

Female Spirit. It delights me ! it delights me !

Male Spirit. But look ! Everything in excess is harmful; all creatures shudder, blinded by the darkness of dense thunderclouds roaring from the tumult of the stormwinds of cosmic destruction, convulsed in the cavernous jaws of Death yawning to consume the world, as if they struggled in Vishnu's maw, his senses torpid in his sleep of devotion at the end of an eon !

Bravo, my child Chandraketu, bravo ! You have prudently released the Wind Weapon. Now

Winds have dissolved the clouds that filled the sky,
As in Nirvana all illusions die. (6)

Female Spirit. My lord ! Who is this who approaches with extreme agitation, tossing the fringes of his cloak streaming in the wind? Even from far off he speaks in sweet, clearly audible words forbidding the continuance of the combat. Now he steers his aerial car to earth directly between the two princes.

Male Spirit. This is the lord of the Raghus, returning from the ritual killing of Sambuka.

Lava, having heard the noble voice
Of Rama, still unseen, none-the-less shuns
The combat. Chandraketu humbly bows.—
May Rama be united with his sons ! (7)

Come, let us leave. (*Exeunt. End of Prologue.*)

(*Enter Rama, with Lava and Chandraketu paying homage to him.*)

Rama (*alighting from his aerial chariot*).

Ah, Chandraketu, come, come to me quickly,
Fold me firmly in your close embrace !
Unfreeze my heart as the spring warmth melts snow !
You are the moon of the Sun's glorious race. (8)

(*with affection and tears raising him up and embracing him*)

Has all gone well with you and the Divine Missiles?

Chandraketu. All has gone well because of my friendship with this most gracious and courageous youth, the hero, Lava. I beg you, my lord, to give him the same affection that you give me, or even greater love.

Rama (*looking at Lava*). I am happy that my child's friend is so handsome, poised and graceful.

He seems the science of arms incarnated
To free the world, guardian of Vedantic law,
An assemblage of all virtues and all powers,
Object of men's devotion, love and awe ! (9)

Lava (*aside*). Ah, what serenity and what dignity this august hero shows !

He is the source of all security,
Essential good in all humanity. (10)

Miraculous !

All enmity is ended. Joy has seized me.
My impudence is gone, I know not where.
Modesty has conquered. When I see him
I breathe and live in some diviner air.
I lose myself in him; or do great souls,
Like shrines, evoke an awe beyond compare? (11)

Rama. Ah, why is it that suddenly all my weight of grief is lifted and my whole spirit filled with affection and joy? But, truly, love itself always springs from some unknown cause:

The causes of affection no man knows;
Mysterious ties entwine two hearts as one.
The moonstone moistens as the moon emerges;
The lotus opens at the rising sun. (12)

Lava. Chandraketu, who is this illustrious man?

Chandraketu. My dear friend, he is the father of our family.

Lava. Then he must be so to me; since you call me your sworn brother and devoted friend. But I have learned from the *Ramayana* story that there are four heroes who merit this respect from you. Which one is this?

Chandraketu. He is the oldest.

Lava (*joyfully*). Ha ! Then he is Rama, lord of the Raghus ! What a blessed day has dawned for me that enables me to see him! Sire, I am Lava, pupil of Valmiki. I bow before you.

Rama. Come, child, come! (*He embraces him warmly.*) Do not be reserved and bashful! Let me embrace you again and again!

Your touch is firm and smooth and yet as soft
As the center of the full-grown lotus flower,
Cool as fragrant juice of sandalwood
Or nectarous rays at the moon's ripest hour. (13)

Lava (*aside*). What spontaneous affection this hero shows for me, while I have foolishly spoken rudely of him and even taken arms against him! (*aloud*) Dear Father, will you forgive my childish folly?

Rama. What folly can my dear child have committed?

Chandraketu. He vaunted his heroism when he heard the escorts of the sacrificial horse proclaiming your own glory.

Rama. O, this is an ornament in chivalry:

A man of highest valor cannot brook
Fame of others spread too far abroad.
This is his true and honest character,
Not any way assumed but in accord
With nature; so the ignited fire-stone flames,
Returning hot rays of the sun, his lord. (14)

Chandraketu. Even arrogance is graceful in such a hero. Look, father, how the Missile of Stupefaction discharged by my friend has paralyzed all these soldiers, leaving them motionless.

Rama (*looking about*). Dear Lava, withdraw the missile, and, Chandraketu comfort our soldiers who are so overcome and paralyzed.

Chandraketu. I shall obey your command. (*Exit.*)

Lava. Father, the missile is recalled.

Rama. Dear Lava, these missiles so readily expelled and withdrawn by secret charms are handed down by tradition;

Brahma and others, faithful to the Vedas,
Practised penance for a thousand years,
Whereby those ancient sages saw as payment
For their fierce penitential flames, these spears. (15)

The magic spells for these missiles were transmitted by the noble Krisasva to Visvamitra, his pupil for more than a millenium, and that sage transferred them to me. This has been their succession up to the present. So tell me, my young friend, how you received them.

Lava. The missiles revealed themselves to both of us spontaneously.

Rama (*thoughtfully*). Anything is possible! Great virtues may have marvelous consequences. But why did you say 'to both of us.'

Lava. We are twin brothers.

Rama. Then where is your brother?

Voice (*behind the curtain*).

'Is there in truth a battle taking place
Between Lava and the soldiers of the king,
As rumor says?—What do you say? 'My friend,
It is so indeed.'—Then let us quickly bring
This warfare to an end; let all our pride
Of chivalry be a forgotten thing! (16)

Rama. **But who is this, with body sapphire-blue,**
Whose voice brings joyous tinglings to my flesh,
As in all seasons a deep thunder-cloud
Causes kadamba trees to bloom afresh? (17)

Lava. Here is my elder brother, Kusa, returning from Bharata's hermitage.

Rama (*eagerly*). Tell him to come here, my dear boy!

Lava. So I will. (*He goes toward Kusa.*)

Kusa (*entering*).

My bow, refulgent with the flames of war,
Would be well blessed if there should be a fray
With champions of the Solar race, who promised,
Since Manu's age, the force of their array
To aid great Indra in his sacred wars
With fullest pomp and chivalrous display. (18)

(*He walks about proudly.*)

Rama. What a chivalrous and magnificent young warrior !

His firm and haughty steps bend down the earth;
His eye regards all the three worlds as straw;
Though still a boy, he shows a mountain's strength;
Heroism incarnate holds us all in awe. (19)

Lava (*to Kusa*). Victory to the hero !

Kusa. Tell me, brother, what is this report I hear of a combat?

Lava. Oh, nothing to mention ! Put your haughtiness aside and do him honor !

Kusa. Why so?

Lava. Because the king, lord of Raghus, is here. He is friendly to us and eagerly wishes to meet you.

Kusa (*thinking*). Do you mean the great hero in the poem called *Ramayana*, guardian of the treasuries of Divine Wisdom?

Lava. Yes, this is he.

Kusa. Surely, he is an illustrious man, a blessing for us to see and always to be longed for. But how can such a hero be properly saluted?

Lava. In the right manner for saluting our family preceptor; simply with deepest reverence.

Kusa. How can that be in this case?

Lava. Chandraketu is here, Urmila's son. He has taken me into his closest friendship, the equal of bortherhood. Through this relationship the royal sage is even literally our father.

Kusa. Then we can certainly honor him without dishonoring ourselves.

(*The two walk about.*)

Lava. Look, brother, at this great hero. His demeanor, serenity and majesty indicate his noble and numberless accomplishments.

Kusa (*looking closely*).

How gracious is his form, how sanctifying
His majesty, incarnate beauty in human reach !
Rightly does the poet of our Ramayana
Praise him, exalted by the Goddess Speech. (20)

(*stepping nearer to Rama*) Father, I am Kusa, Valmiki's pupil. I salute you.

Rama. Come, dear boy, come:

How I long to embrace him with my love,
Heroic in his soul, divinely limbed,
His stature flowing in majestic grace,
Like a dark thundercloud with nectar brimmed ! (21)

(*embracing him; aside*) Whose child can this be?

When I embrace him, all my body streams
With nectarous juices, as if he and I
Were of one essence, as if both were born
Together from rich fluids our limbs supply. (22)

Lava. Father, the sun shines directly on your forehead. Do you wish to sit in the thick shade of this sala tree?

Rama. I shall do as my child wishes. (*They walk about and sit themselves in the correct stations.*) (*aside*)

Ha ! though Kusa and Lava be alike
In modesty, as greatness in the bud,
Their gesture and manner of walking, sitting, standing,
Imply the presence of imperial blood. (23)

Out of the stately graces of their form
Some blest, mysterious effluence is made,
As from the honey-dropping lotus flower
Or gracious radiance of purest jade. (24)

I also see that both have many of the features belonging to princes of the Raghu race.

Their skin is blue as a male pigeon's throat,
Their stature bull-like but not cumbersome,
Their glance as steady as a dauntless lion,
Their voice as deep as a resounding drum. (25)

Ah, they not only resemble me, but:

These also are the traits of Sita, all
Clearly to be witnessed in this pair;
It is as if, on seeing them before me,
The fawn-like beauty of my wife were there. (26)

Their teeth shine with the lustre of fresh pearls;
They show the same curves of the lip and ear;
To be sure, I note the eye is not so blue,
Yet the same joyful radiance is here. (27)

(*reflectively*) This is also the forest containing Valmiki's hermitage, where, as I was told, I abandoned queen Sita. This is the place; and the age, appearance and majesty of the two boys are all in agreement. Can it be that my injunction to the missiles at the time of the picture-viewing accounts for the boys' having them today? I have heard that even in ancient times the missiles were never granted without due instruction. Then a vast joy gives confidence to my wavering heart. I often observed that Sita was bearing twins. (*weeping*)]

For when the love, already taken root,
Had grown from our familiarity,
With gentle touch upon her I perceived—
Though her eyes closed from natural modesty—
The twins within her; at a later time
She learned what the forthcoming birth would be. (28)

What pretext can I find for questioning the boys?

Lava. Father, what does this mean?

A flood of tears ennobles your dear face
As raindrops give a flower its added grace. (29)

Kusa. You surely understand, dear brother.

Rama without Sita must be sad.
The loved one lost, all joy is overthrown.
On one side boundless love and on the other
Separation for which nothing can atone.—
Who do you ask such questions of me here,
As if our Ramayana were unknown? (30)

Rama (*aside*). Oh, they talk with each other as though this does not concern them. It is foolish to question them after all! O my poor heart, what was the need of this sudden excitement? The boys pity me because I cannot control my sorrow. Well, I shall change the subject. (*aloud*) I have learned recently of a poem called *Ramayana* in praise of the Solar race, a work of the learned and eloquent sage, Valmiki, inspired by the Goddess Speech. I should be glad to hear some part of it.

Kusa. We have studied the whole story. I recall two stanzas in the last canto of the section on Rama's youth.

Rama. Recite them, dear lad.

Kusa. **Rama, adoring Sita, loved to view her,**
Yet still her virtues drew him closer to her. (31)

Sita loved Rama more than life, for they
Knew more of love than human tongue can say. (32)

Rama. Oh, this is the cruelest blow on my heart. Ah, my queen, it was so indeed! The capricious changes of fortune in this world are torture in themselves, only at last to vanish as phantoms.

Where now are the delights of intimacy,
Where now the mutual joy of hearts at peace?
Nevertheless, this life of mine still throbs
In utter wretchedness that will not cease. (33)

O, the pity:

I have been forced to recollect the years
I passed with her, unvisited by tears. (34)

Then each day brought forth a little further
The flower-like rondure of each budding breast.
Youth, affection and desire throbbed saucily,
While bashfulness kept feelings unexpressed. (35)

Lava. This is another verse, one that the king of the Raghus spoke to queen Sita when they were delighting themselves on the lovely banks of the Mandakini river near Mount Chitrakuta:

As if to grace the pleasure of bride and groom,
This tree sheds on this ledge its showers of bloom. (36)

Rama (*smiling but showing bashfulness, love and sorrow*). Boys are naturally innocent, especially when living in the forest. Ah, Queen ! Do you remember the joy we had there during our unreserved intimacies?

I see, as if before me, a woman's face,
Cool, fatigued, and moistened, its forehead hung
With hairs stirred by mild breezes from the river,
Wearing its natural beauty, never strung
With ornaments; ears charming, with no pendants;
Beauty the poet himself has left unsung. (37)

(*remains meditating; speaks pathetically*). There is no wonder in this:

By brooding long and often on the loved one
In places which she held forever dear,
Surely, even though she were far away,
Some feeble consolation might appear;
But the world is withered when one's wife is dead.
The heart is then a husk, vacant and seer. (38)

Voice (*behind the curtain*).

Vasishtha Valmiki, queens of Dasaratha,
Janaka and Arundhati, feeling dread
On learning of the quarrel of the boys,
Are coming nearer, although strength has fled
From aged legs and distances are long.
Though spirits are eager, limbs are all but dead. (39)

Rama. What, are the revered Arundhati and Vasishtha and the queen-mothers, with Janaka, all coming here? I am already in misery and this falls as a thunderbolt.

I observed that meeting of two fathers when,
On the occasion of our marriage-day,
Vasishtha and all the others were present as now,
And now what have I possibly to say
To my father's friends, when brought to this sad plight?
What can poor Rama do in his dismay? (40)

Voice. What a misfortune !

Have mercy ! Having seen king Rama weeping,
Lord of the Sun with pallor of the moon,
Janaka, who fell the first, and all the mothers
Themselves are falling also in a swoon. (41)

Rama. Ah, my father and my mother !

Ah, Janaka ! Your mercy is thrown away
On me, who had the audacity to condemn
Sita, through whom the Raghu and Janaka
Families were blessed.—Yet I will bow to them. (42)

(*He arises.*)

Kusa and Lava. This way, father, this way ! (*All walk round, showing deep emotion, and then go out.*)

Act Seven

The Reunion

Lakshmana (*entering*). Welcome, my good people! Today, as you know, the sage Valmiki has summoned us and all our subjects, coming from town and country, with all the warriors and priests, and, moreover, by his supernatural power he has assembled here the entire throng of gods and demons, animals and serpent kings, with the whole world of moveable and immoveable creatures. My noble brother said to me: 'Dear Lakshmana, the sage Valmiki invites us to see his play performed by the celestial nymphs. So go to the banks of the holy Ganges and seat the audience in ceremonial order inside our theatre.' So I have arranged to seat the entire company of mortals and immortals. Look:

But here I see my noble brother coming,
Honoring lord Valmiki and his age,
Who, though still advisor to our kingdom,
Keeps the austere vows of a hermitage. (1)

Rama (*entering*). Dear Lakshmana, has the audience taken its seats?

Lakshmana. Yes.

Rama. See that those two youths, Kusa and Lava, have places of honor equal to that of Prince Chandraketu.

Lakshmana. That is just what I have done, knowing how much your Majesty loves them. Here is the royal seat arranged for you. (*Both sit down.*)

Rama. Now, begin the play.

Stage-Manager (*entering*). The sage Valmiki, whose words are the voice of truth and wisdom, has addressed the entire world of zoological and botanical creatures. 'You will now witness the poetic composition that dawned upon us through spiritual

inspiration, pure, ennobling and abounding in sentiments of pathos and wonder. Attend to it closely because of the importance of its contents.'

Rama. This proves to us that a sage knows by intuition what is wise and right. The noble mind is untouched by passion and therefore the receptacle of truth. It is never troubled and so should never be questioned.

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Ah, my lord! Ah, Prince Lakshmana! Here I am alone and helpless. My delivery is near. These wild beasts threaten to attack me. I am in despair. I shall throw myself into the Ganges.

Lakshamana (*aside*). Ah, this is utterly astonishing!

Stage-Manager.

Left in the cruel forest by her husband,
The noblest queen and daughter of the Earth,
Casts herself on the mercy of the Ganges,
Deserted in heaving pangs of her child-birth. (2)

(*Exit.*)

(*The Prologue Ends.*)

Rama (*wildly*). Queen, queen! Hold back, hold back!

Lakshmana. My lord, this is only a play!

Rama. Ah, my queen, my dear companion in the Dandaka forest! Your calamity is all due to me!

Lakshmana. My brother, keep your mind on the performance!

Rama. Here I sit, with a heart of stone. (*Enter Sita, upheld by the goddesses of Earth* (*Prithivi*) *and the Ganges* (*Bhagirathi*), *each with an infant in arm.*) Brother, support me! I feel plunged into some unknown abyss, some impenetrable gloom.

The Two Goddesses.

Take heart, most blest of women, for you are favored
By fortune! A miracle has taken place!
Bathed in the holy waters of the Ganges
You have born two sons to the great Solar race!
When destiny determines on our fate,
Who is there ever who can bar the gate? (3)

Sita (*recovering*). Oh, joy! I have given birth to two sons! —Ha, my noble husband! (*Swoons.*)

Lakshmana (*falling at Rama's feet*). Look, dear brother, how blest we are! The Raghu stock has bloomed gloriously once more. (*observing*) But look here, look here! My noble brother has swooned completely away, exhausted in the flood of his tears. (*He fans Rama's face.*)

The Two Goddesses. Take heart, dear daughter, take heart!

Sita (*recovering*). Who are you, ladies?

Prithivi. This is the guardian deity of your father-in-law's house, the river goddess, Bhagirathi.

Sita. My homage to you, noble one!

Bhagirathi. May you win all the blessings that you well deserve!

Lakshmana. We are blessed!

Bhagirathi. This is the noble goddess, the all-nourishing Earth, your mother.

Sita. Ah, mother, you see how wretched I am!

Prithivi. Come to me, darling! Come, my child! (*Both faint after embracing each other.*)

Lakshmana (*joyfully*). Still, it is fortunate that Earth and Ganges have taken the queen into their care.

Rama (*observing*). That is so, but I shudder at it.

Bhagirathi. Mother love must be overpowering, since even the goddess Earth, who sustains us all, is overwhelmed. But it would be better to note that no sentient being escapes the mysterious net of the world's infatuation. Child, Videha's princess, and dear goddess Earth, both take heart, take heart!

Prithivi (*recovering*). Goddess! How can I take comfort, since I am Sita's mother?

First were the months in Lanka, which she spent
With Ravana; then her worse abandonment. (4-a)

Bhagirathi.

When destiny determines on our fate,
Who is there ever who can bar the gate? (4-b)

Prithivi. Bhagirathi, has your dear Rama been true to himself in all this?

He was regardless of my Sita's hand,
Clasped in tender years no tears deface,
Regardless of me, Janaka, Sita's trial,
Her penance, or continuance of his race. (5)

Sita. Ah, my husband, I am reminded of you.—

Prithivi. Indeed, who is your husband now?

Sita (*shamed and in tears*). It is however as my mother says.

Rama. Mother Earth, I confess I am as you declare.

Bhagirathi. Noble Earth, source of all good things, you are the soul and body of the living world. Why are you angry with him, when you know all the circumstances?

Calumny gained ground among the folk;
As for the fire-ordeal, it is true
They knew it, but as it had taken place
In far-off Lanka, they cast it out of view.
Tradition bids the king to please the people.
What, therefore, was our darling child to do? (6)

Lakshmana. Gods have a full and natural understanding of all creatures.

Bhagirathi. Still, I fold my hands petitioning for grace to the king.

Rama. Holy Mother Ganges, you have always been gracious to the descendents of the Ganges.

Prithivi. I am always propitious to you. I spoke severely because I was suddenly overcome by affection. I know dear Rama's love for Sita well.

Sita abandoned to her fate, he lives
Sustained by courage and help his nation gives. (7)

Rama. The elders have certainly been kind to Sita.

Sita (*in tears, and folding her hands*). Mother Earth, take me to eternal rest in your bosom !

Rama. What else could she say?

Bhagirathi. Heaven forbid ! May you live for a thousand years !

Prithivi. Child, you must care for your children !

Sita. What can I do for them, now that I am without a husband?

Rama. My heart is stone !

Bhagirathi. How can you be without a lord when your lord is still alive?

Sita. What does my husband mean to me in all this wretchedness?

The Two Goddesses.

How can you, the world's blessing, underprize
Yourself, when we feel purer in your eyes? (8)

(*A noise behind the curtain.*)

Lakshmana. Brother, did you hear that?

Rama. Let the people hear ! Something still more wonderful must be about to happen.

Sita. Why is all the sky aflame?

The Two Goddesses. We know:

These are the missiles of which Visvamitra
And Rama were the masters. They are here !
Ah, the holy Missiles of Stupefaction
In courtesy to our dramatist appear ! (9)

Voice. **Hail, Queen Sita ! We come before your eyes**
Offering you full sustenance and aid,
As answer to King Rama's prayer, offered
At the time the sacred pictures were displayed. (10)

Sita. Ah, these are the Divine Missiles ! Oh my husband, you are kind to me even now !

Lakshmana. My noble brother once said to Sita: 'The Missiles will attend on your offspring.'

The Two Goddesses. We offer homage to you, mighty Missiles;

We are blessed in you. And may you be revealed
To these two princes meditating on you
In time of trouble, calling you, their shield ! (11)

Rama. **Grief changed to joy, leagued with astonishment,**
Makes me a spectacle of wonderment ! (12)

The Two Goddesses. Rejoice, child ! Now your sons are equals to our dear Rama.

Sita. But, goddess, who will perform their initiation rites for manhood and chivalry?

Rama. **She, even she, maintainer of the line**
Of Raghu kings under Vasishtha's care,
Finds no one to perform for her two sons
Sacraments befitting a kingly heir. (13)

Bhagirathi. Child, why be anxious? When they are weaned, I shall assign them to the care of the sage, Valmiki. He will perform the rites and give them their instruction as noblemen.

Valmiki is like Vasishtha and Angirasa,
Guide to both families, Raghu and Janaka. (14)

Rama. The revered Bhagirathi has an excellent plan.

Lakshmana. My noble brother, I truly believe this evidence shows who Kusa and Lava are:

These two, possessing the Missiles from their birth,
Both in Valmiki's care, heroic, bold,
And both resembling the noble one in features,
Twins in all aspects, are now twelve years old. (15)

Rama. Dear Lakshmana, this is why my heart is bewildered and lost.

Prithivi. Come, daughter, come and let your presence bless my home in the underworld !

Sita. I would rather have the Earth permit me to sleep on her breast. I cannot endure the humiliation of vicissitudes in this world of mortals.

Rama. What will she answer?

Prithivi. Child, take my counsel and care for your sons until they are weaned. Afterwards, do as seems best.

Bhagirathi. That is the right course to follow. (*Exeunt Ganges, Earth and Sita.*)

Rama. What ! Has Queen Sita really gone to another World? Ah, Queen ! My dear companion in the Dandaka forest ! The very deity of goodness ! Are you really gone? (*Swoons.*)

Lakshmana. Help, help, noble Valmiki ! Is this the goal of your poem?

Voice (*behind the curtain*). Remove the musical instruments ! Clear the scene ! Listen, all immortals and all mortal creatures who move or grow ! See the divine miracle ordained by the sage Valmiki !

Lakshmana (*observing*).

Ganges is agitated as if churned;
Sages crowd the sky; the blessed daughter
Of Earth, aided herself by Earth and Ganges,
Rises on high triumphant from the water. (16)

Voice (*behind the curtain*). World-honored Arundhati, pray accept

The greetings of the River and the Earth.
Here we deliver Sita, of holy life,
Our darling daughter, on her own rebirth ! (17)

Lakshmana. A miracle ! a miracle ! Look, look, noble brother ! (*observing*) Ah, he has not even yet recovered consciousness!

(*Enter Arundhati and Sita.*)

Arundhati.

Hasten to me, dear princess of Videha,
Come, Sita, come, abandon bashfulness;
And do you, Sita, touch him with your hand,
Reviving him with your old gentleness ! (18)

Sita (*excited; touching Rama*). Revive, my noble husband, take heart !

Rama (*recovering; with delight*). Ah, what is this? Can it be my queen? (*confused*) Oh, here is my mother, Arundhati, and here are Rishyasringa with Santa and all the other elders, rejoicing !

Arundhati. Dear Rama, here is the noble Ganges, guardian deity of your family, come to bless you.

Voice (*behind the curtain*). When he abandoned Sita the great king said: ' Mother Ganga, cherish kindly thoughts for your daughter-in-law, just as Arundhati, does.' So now, king, I have complied with your own words about my daughter.

Arundhati. Here is your wife's mother, sacred Earth, giver of all blessings.

Voice. When you abandoned Sita you said: ' O blessed and all-merciful Earth, protect Sita, your pure and innocent daughter.' I have now performed the command of my dear lord concerning my daughter, Sita.

Rama. What ! Have the noble goddesses been so generous to me after my terrible guilt? (*He bows to them.*)

Arundhati. Listen, all you citizens and country people ! Now when you see the goddesses of the Earth and the holy Ganges praising Sita and placing her in my care; and now as you recall that long ago the sacred Fire, with Brahma and all other gods, applauded her, will you at last consent to take her as your queen, the loyal daughter of the race of the Sun, born from the sacrificial earth of the gods themselves? Worthy people, what do you think now?

Lakshmana. Look ! When they are so roundly scolded by Arundhati, our subjects have changed their views completely ! They honor Sita with showers of blossoms and so do the seven sages and all the world's divine guardians !

Arundhati. Lord of the world, dear Rama,

This is your faithful Sita; join with her
In rites of sacrifice as used of old;
She is the fitting consort for your ritual,
Original of your effigy of gold. (19)

Sita (*aside*). My lord well understands how my sorrows may be wiped away.

Rama. I shall do as the revered Arundhati commands.

Lakshmana. Now I have achieved my heart's only wish.

Sita. I live again.

Lakshmana. Noble Queen, Lakshmana, who wronged you in so foul a way, bows to you.

Sita. But you are as dear to me as ever. Long life to you !

Arundhati. Sage Valmiki, now lead to Rama his two sons by Sita, young Kusa and Lava !

Rama and Lakshmana. What joy ! It is really as we imagined.

Sita (*with tears and much excitement*). Where, where, my dears?

(*Enter Valmiki, leading Kusa and Lava.*)

Valmiki. Kusa and Lava, dear boys, this is your father, lord of the Raghus; this is Lakshmana, your famous uncle; this is Queen Sita, who bore you; this is the royal sage, Janaka, her father.

Sita (*with joy and amazement*). What ! Is my father here !

Kusa and Lava. Father ! Mother ! Grandfather !

Rama (*embracing them*). Ah, my precious boys ! You are restored to us only by divine grace.

Sita. Come, dear Kusa, come, dear Lava ! Give your mother close and long embraces ! I am born again !

Kusa and Lava. We are blessed !

Sita. Great sage, I bow before you !

Valmiki. Dear child, remain long united with your family !

Sita. Oh joy ! Here is my father, our family preceptors, these two revered ladies, and queen Santa and her husband ! Here I am at the feet of my noble husband, with Lakshmana, Kusa and Lava beside me ! This joy of seeing you all together overwhelms me.

Valmiki (*rising and looking about*). This is Satrughna, lord of Mathura, coming to join us, after triumphantly vanquishing the demon Lavana.

Lakshmana. One good fortune brings another.

Rama. Although I experience all this, even yet I cannot believe it ! But this is true of all greatly wished-for blessings.

Valmiki. Tell me, my dear Rama; what more can I do for you?

Rama. Are there any more good things to give? However, I shall say further:

Our story, like the mothers, Earth and Ganga,
Cleanses from evil; every good conferred
On men proceeds from them. The wise men cherish
Brahma revealed by miming and by word.

(*Exeunt omnes.*)